



News Release

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Winter Salt Week Event Highlights Hidden Costs of Road Salt on Drinking Water and Rivers

ROCKVILLE, MD (February 3, 2026) - On January 31, the Izaak Walton League of America in partnership with the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB) and the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection hosted a Winter Salt Awareness Week open house at the League’s national headquarters in Gaithersburg, Maryland.

Each year, 20 to 30 million tons of winter salt are applied across the United States to improve winter safety, but overuse comes at a significant cost to waterways, drinking water and infrastructure. Once applied, salt runs off paved surfaces and becomes a permanent pollutant—just one teaspoon can contaminate five gallons of water—posing long-term risks to freshwater ecosystems and public health. These impacts were highlighted during the Winter Salt Week open house, part of a nationwide campaign to raise awareness about winter salt pollution and promote reduction solutions.

The event was part of national [Winter Salt Week](#) which brought together local and regional partners who shared how their organizations are educating the public about smart salting practices and the effects of winter salt on wildlife, water quality and infrastructure. [Additional regional events](#) included webinars focused on winter smart salting for residents and property managers. The week was well timed this year, as there was an unprecedented snowfall event the weekend prior, leading to egregious oversalting and salt shortages across the country.

“The data shows that the Potomac River — the source of drinking water for millions in the DC metro area — is not only getting saltier, but the higher levels of salt can be found in the river even during the summer months”, said ICPRB Executive Director Michael Nardolilli. “So, salt is becoming persistent in the environment even when salt is no longer being applied on our roads and sidewalks in the winter. The time to reduce our winter salt use is now.”

The event featured a range of speakers representing local, state and regional organizations who discussed how data, policy and on-the-ground practices can reduce winter salt pollution. Maryland Delegate Linda Foley, District 15, Montgomery County spoke about the leadership of Delegate Lily Qi and the Izaak Walton League for working on legislation to reduce winter salt pollution across the state.

Priscilla To, Ph.D., water director at the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission, said, “Safe, reliable drinking water starts at the source and source water protection is the first step.” WSSC Water and others are “collaborating together and getting things done.”

Montgomery County Councilmember-at-Large, Laurie-Anne Sayles noted that, “Environmental decisions are not just about the environment.” Those decisions are also about advancing equity because environmental decisions

also affect the people who live, play, learn and work in the regions where those decisions have an impact—particularly those who have been historically marginalized and who will feel the effects of these decisions the most.

Leaders from the Izaak Walton League highlighted efforts to monitor chloride levels in waterways and use that data to drive changes in winter maintenance practices, while noting that we all still have work to do to reduce oversalting practices. “Most people are surprised to learn how little salt it actually takes to keep sidewalks and roads safe,” said Jared Mott, Interim Executive Director of the League. “Winter Salt Week is about giving people the knowledge they need to reduce pollution and protect local waterways. The League is proud to be a national leader in stopping winter salt pollution at the source, and we’re grateful to all our partners and especially want to thank everyone who participated today. Together, we can make our community a cleaner, healthier place to live and work while still protecting the safety of all that travel here in the winter months.”

Additional speakers from the ICPRB, Maryland Department of the Environment, Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection and others discussed the work done to raise awareness around smart salting practices such as creating a state level road salt applicator training program. Participants also engaged in hands-on activities, including demonstrations by Jason Swope of the Chesapeake Conservation Landscaping Council of smart salting techniques for sidewalks and parking areas that showed how communities can stay safe, save money, and protect water resources while using less salt.

Attendees also brought water samples to be tested for salt pollution. League staff assisted attendees with water testing and helped them to report their results on the League’s online water quality database, the Clean Water Hub. Sixty-eight attendees came to the event, with one attendee describing the event as “energizing and magical.”

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Photos available upon request.

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The ICPRB is an interstate compact commission established by Congress in 1940. Its mission is to protect and enhance the waters and related resources of the Potomac River basin through science, regional cooperation, and education. Represented by appointed commissioners, the ICPRB includes the District of Columbia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and the federal government.