

Salt and the environment

Written by Alison Grange

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Herefordshire Council has attained ISO 14001 certification, the International Environmental Management Standard for its Good Environmental Management (GEM) system. Salt shall be stored in accordance with a defined procedure the purpose of this is to minimize pollution from the leaching of dissolved salt and to make most effective use of salt by using it only when conditions require. In this way the service will contribute towards sustaining Herefordshire's biodiversity and character.

In order to minimize pollution from leaching of salt, the provision of grit bins and piles will be kept to an absolute minimum and will be carefully reviewed each year. Where a site assessment indicates that the salt water run-off is likely to significantly affect nearby vegetation and/or water courses, salt storage bins will be used.

Due to environmental considerations and in partnership with Amey, salt storage facilities have been reviewed. A covered salt store has been provided at Thorn Depot to add to those in existence at Kingsland and Pontrilas.

Following a number of national trials, Safecote, a proprietary coating applied to salt has been found to provide the following advantages:

- Reduced tonnage used
- Reduced environmental impact
- Inhibits corrosion
- Reduced leaching

The material has been trailed successfully at our Bromyard Depot for a number of seasons. The 2008/9 season will be the first in which Safecote will be used throughout the county. With a number of detailed changes to working practice, we anticipate being able to reduce the tonnage used during a typical winter by 28 per cent.

In addition to this we anticipate that, again with some detailed changes to working practices, particularly at the end of each season, the use of safecote will extend the useful life of our gritters. We hope to extend the working life of each new gritter from 8 to 10 years.

Whilst the cost of Safecote is approximately 29 per cent more than our traditional 6mm salt, this move should result in a potential (including the costs associated with extending the life of plant) £46,500 efficiency saving against each years winter maintenance budget.

In addition to this there is a cost saving to the community as a whole, principally due to reduced corrosion, this is estimated to be £340,000 over each winter.

Initially salt volumes will be maintained across the county at 2007/8 levels.

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The additional environmental benefits and the potential reduction in storage volumes and the potential for savings in storage facilities have yet to be properly quantified financially.

Clive Hall, Highway Network Manager
Herefordshire Council

Editor's note

This article is a response to a query I made about the environmental impact of gritting with salt.