

# Salt Management Strategy Education and Outreach Workgroup Pilot Communications Plan

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## *Outreach Pilot Campaign for the Salt Management Strategy*

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### Purpose

The Education and Outreach Workgroup of the [Salt Management Strategy \(SaMS\)](#) is conducting this pilot outreach effort to:

- Test messages and materials developed by the Education and Outreach Workgroup to gauge the extent to which they resonate with the general public and target audience.

### Background

- *What's the issue?*

In winter, salt helps keep us safe during slick weather conditions. Salt applied to paved surfaces prevents slip and fall injuries, reduces vehicle crashes and keeps businesses and government open. However, winter salts have negative impacts on the environment, such as increased salinity in streams and groundwater, increased costs for maintenance and replacement of corroded vehicles and infrastructure, and public health problems associated with saltier drinking water sources. Our challenge is to find the balance between the benefits of salt application and the unintended impacts while continuing to keep the same levels of safety. Increasing awareness as well as ways individuals and organizations can optimize their winter practices and encouraging them to take action will put Northern Virginia on the path toward minimizing these negative effects.

- *What's being done to address it?*

A diverse set of stakeholders, coordinated by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, is developing the SaMS with recommendations for improving winter practices that promote the efficient and effective use of salts. The strategy will also contain options for raising awareness of these impacts, ways individuals can make a difference, and recommendations for a monitoring and research program to implement an adaptive management strategy for the SaMS.

- *Who is leading the effort on communications for this pilot?*

The Education and Outreach Workgroup, a subcommittee of the SaMS Stakeholder Advisory Committee, will coordinate this pilot outreach plan. Information learned from the pilot outreach effort will be used to refine this workgroup's final recommendations for the SaMS.

## Pilot Framework

- Long Branch Watershed Outreach (part of the larger Accotink Creek watershed, located within Fairfax County)
  - Postcard mailers
    - In the beginning of November 2019, mailers will be sent to residents in the Long Branch watershed advertising a listening session to be held on December 3, 2019 and will include the SaMS logo.
  - Listening session
    - On December 3, 2019, the Education and Outreach workgroup members, in coordination with local watershed leaders (such as Long Branch Civic Association, Friends of Long Branch Stream Valley and Friends of Accotink Creek), will hold one listening session to gather feedback from watershed residents on the overarching SaMS message and outreach methods/materials.
- Northern Virginia Outreach - SaMS message testing
  - Step 1: “What is SaMS,” Introduce SaMS and encourage SaMS newsletter sign up
    - Partner organizations distribute content as a single social media post or once as part of a newsletter or email.
    - Timing:
      - Week of November 18, 2019
    - Content:
      - SaMS Logo and the option to include a picture
      - Partner organizations can share the suggested language provided below, or have the option to draft their own message using the message elements in the bullets below:
        - Suggested language for a newsletter or email: “In the winter, salt provides many benefits. However, salt has negative impacts. Learn how [partners in Northern Virginia](#) are working to strike a balance with a [Salt Management Strategy \(SaMS\)](#) by signing up to learn more [here](#). #WinterSaltSmart #LearnAboutSalt”
        - Suggested language for social media:
          - **Facebook:** “Winter salt use provides many benefits, but also has serious negative impacts. That’s why DEQ and a group of stakeholders are taking part in SaMS, a Salt Management Strategy working to balance responsible environmental stewardship with safety in Northern Virginia. To learn more and sign up for further information, click here: <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/SaMS.aspx> #WinterSaltSmart #LearnAboutSalt”

- **Twitter:** “Winter salt use has many benefits, but also negative impacts. That’s why stakeholders are taking part in SaMS, a Salt Management Strategy working to balance these benefits and impacts. Learn more and sign up to get informed:  
<https://www.deq.virginia.gov/SaMS.aspx>  
#WinterSaltSmart”
- Message elements to compile a unique message:
  - Winter salt use has benefits and impacts (aim to strike a balance)
  - The SaMS is being developed by a group of stakeholders that aim to strike a balance between the benefits and impacts of winter salt use.
    - *Optional:* include a link to this page that outlines the organizations developing SaMS:  
[https://www.deq.virginia.gov/Portals/0/DEQ/Water/TMDL/SaMS/Organizations\\_Developing\\_SaMS.pdf](https://www.deq.virginia.gov/Portals/0/DEQ/Water/TMDL/SaMS/Organizations_Developing_SaMS.pdf)
    - *Optional:* include a link to the SaMS webpage:  
<https://www.deq.virginia.gov/SaMS.aspx>
  - Invite audience to sign up to learn more at  
<https://visitor.r20.constantcontact.com/d.jsp?llr=nyolw7cab&p=oi&m=1102622079757&sit=txrp5oieb&f=94db84a4-6844-41be-afcb-b25f07c94ac8>
  - Include the hashtags #WinterSaltSmart and #LearnAboutSalt
  - *Optional:* Perspective on why the organization distributing the message is participating in the SaMS
- Step 2: “Awareness,” Share awareness information
  - Partner organizations distribute content as a single social media post, and the 1<sup>st</sup> SaMS awareness newsletter will be distributed to the contact list.
  - Timing:
    - Week of December 9, 2019
  - Content:
    - Social Media Posts:
      - SaMS Logo and the option to include a picture
      - Partner organizations can share 1 of the 3 options for suggested language provided below, or have the option to draft their own message using the message elements in the bullets below:
      - Suggested language (use 1 of the 3):
        - #WinterSaltSmart #LearnAboutSalt Learn more about salt use in Northern Virginia at:  
[https://www.deq.virginia.gov/Portals/0/DEQ/Water/TMDL/SaMS/SaMS\\_1pg\\_flyer\\_201910.pdf](https://www.deq.virginia.gov/Portals/0/DEQ/Water/TMDL/SaMS/SaMS_1pg_flyer_201910.pdf)

- #WinterSaltSmart Want to learn how we're doing this in Northern Virginia?  
[https://www.deq.virginia.gov/Portals/0/DEQ/Water/TMDL/SaMS/SaMS\\_1pg\\_flyer\\_201910.pdf](https://www.deq.virginia.gov/Portals/0/DEQ/Water/TMDL/SaMS/SaMS_1pg_flyer_201910.pdf)  
#LearnAboutSalt
- #WinterSaltSmart #LearnAboutSalt The pluses and minuses of salt use in Northern Virginia at:  
[https://www.deq.virginia.gov/Portals/0/DEQ/Water/TMDL/SaMS/SaMS\\_1pg\\_flyer\\_201910.pdf](https://www.deq.virginia.gov/Portals/0/DEQ/Water/TMDL/SaMS/SaMS_1pg_flyer_201910.pdf)
- Message elements to compile a unique message:
  - Language that entices the reader to learn more about the topic. As much as possible, this language should maintain a balance between the benefits and impacts of winter salt use.
  - Include the hashtags #WinterSaltSmart and #LearnAboutSalt
  - Include the infographic in the post or provide the link to the 1-page flyer  
([https://www.deq.virginia.gov/Portals/0/DEQ/Water/TMDL/SaMS/SaMS\\_1pg\\_flyer\\_201910.pdf](https://www.deq.virginia.gov/Portals/0/DEQ/Water/TMDL/SaMS/SaMS_1pg_flyer_201910.pdf))
- SaMS Awareness Newsletter
  - A reformatted version of the 1 page flyer, formatted into a newsletter that includes the SaMS logo.

## Objectives and Measures of Success

- Identify reactions to overarching SaMS message and associated topic flyer through feedback from:
  - Social media posts
    - Background information for calculating success
      - Name of social media platform
      - Number of "followers" in organization's network
      - Post Reach/Impressions (i.e., the size of the audience)
      - Date of Post
      - If known, the average post reach/impressions for the organization
    - Engagement metrics for calculating success for each post
      - Number of likes per post (goal: >1%)
      - Comments (goal: > 50% positive sentiment)
      - Number of shares and retweets (goal: >0.5%)
  - Social media traction
    - Tracking of hashtag use
  - Email/Newsletter distribution
    - Background information for calculating success
      - Size of the audience

- Was it part of an email or part of a newsletter
- Date/time of email or newsletter
- If distributing through a newsletter, the average open rate and click rate for the organization
- Open rate
- Interest in newsletter
  - Number of newsletter sign ups
- For social media and email/newsletter message distribution
  - Flyer linked to message distributions
    - Number of page views
      - Using a link shortener and tracking the number of clicks on the link (goal: >2%)
    - SaMS website page views after outreach effort is implemented
      - Linking to the SaMS website (goal: 20% increase)
- Information learned from this pilot project will:
  - Refine this workgroup's recommendations for the final SaMS, such as revising the overarching SaMS message and materials to improve reception by the intended audience.

### Key Messages:

- Tagline: Winter Salt Smart
- Hashtags:
  - #WinterSaltSmart
  - #LearnAboutSalt
- Teaser to encourage the reader to click on link:
  - Learn more about salt use in Northern Virginia at: [web link]
  - Want to learn how we're doing this in Northern Virginia? Click here: [web link]
  - The pluses and minuses of salt use in Northern Virginia at: [web link]
- Awareness message (pulled from one-page flyer)

In the winter, salt helps keep us safe during storms and icy conditions. Salt applied to paved surfaces provide important benefits

  - **For People and Businesses:** Fewer incidents of slip and fall injuries
  - **For Transportation:** Reduces frequency of vehicle crashes by 88%-95%<sup>1,2</sup>
  - **For the Economy:** Enables businesses, government and social services to continue with minimal interruption (avoiding roughly \$300-\$700 million in direct/indirect costs for a major, one-day, statewide storm<sup>3</sup>).

However, winter salts also have impacts to the environment, water quality, infrastructure and public health. After the storm is over, these salts wash off into our streams, causing:

  - **Public Health Impacts:** Harm to public health for those serviced by drinking water supplies with higher salt concentrations.<sup>4</sup> Salt levels in both the Potomac River and

<sup>1</sup> University of Waterloo: <http://www.saltinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Final-Report-L-Fu-Taimur.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Marquette University: <http://www.trc.marquette.edu/publications/IceControl/ice-control-1992.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Global Insight: <http://www.saltinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/economic-costs-of-snowstorms.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Murray, D.M. and U.F. Ernst. 1976. An economic analysis of the environmental impact of highway deicing. EPA-600/2-76-105. EPA Office of Research and Development, Municipal Environmental Research Laboratory. Cincinnati, OH.

Occoquan Reservoir, local drinking water sources, have risen noticeably over the past several decades, with average concentrations more than doubling.

- **Infrastructure Impacts:** Corrosion to vehicles and infrastructure (such as roads, bridges, sidewalks and parking lots) causes higher frequency of replacement and higher maintenance costs.<sup>5</sup>
- **Environmental Impacts:** Increases the salinity in our streams and groundwater, impacting freshwater fish and other aquatic life.

We can balance these unintended impacts from salt use with the important benefits these salts provide during winter storms. The challenge is finding the best balance for Northern Virginia.

- “What is SaMS” message:
  - The Virginia Salt Management Strategy (SaMS) was established by a diverse group of stakeholders coordinated by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). This will provide recommendations for improving winter practices through efficient and effective use of salts while maintaining the same levels of safety. The strategy will also offer ways to raise awareness of these impacts, ways individuals and organizations can participate, and guidance for monitoring and research to support action on SaMS recommendations.
- Where to go for more info?
  - <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/SaMS.aspx>.
- Where to go to provide feedback on outreach?

Please share your feedback on the message and flyer that you viewed by completing this short form <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LMK6MD6>

  1. What is your interest in winter salt issues? [free text block]
  2. What do you think about the information shared in the flyer? [free text block]
  3. Any additional thoughts on winter salt use or our outreach efforts? [free text block]

## Key Audiences

- Residents in the Long Branch watershed (within the larger Accotink Creek watershed in Fairfax County).
- General public of Northern Virginia – more specifically, commuters, homeowners, business owners, winter storm professionals and educators.

## Communication/Distribution Channels:

- Long Branch Watershed Mailers
  - Post card mailers sent to residents of the Long Branch watershed inviting them to the listening session and includes the over-arching message. The distribution of these mailers will be coordinated with Clean Water Action who has funding to support this distribution.
- Long Branch Watershed Listening Session:
  - An informal event to provide opportunity for those in the community to talk with Education & Outreach workgroup members about the SaMS and their thoughts and

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<sup>5</sup> Vitaliano, D. 1992. An economic assessment of the social costs of highway salting and the efficiency of substituting a new deicing material. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 11(3):397-418.

opinions on the outreach materials and messages drafted. Venue will be selected within the Long Branch watershed. Below is a list of organizations that will be contacted to distribute the meeting invite:

- Friends of Accotink Creek
- Long Branch Civic Association
- Friends of Long Branch Stream Valley
- Fairfax County Braddock District Supervisor John Cook's network
- Posting flyers
  - On neighborhood social media pages
  - At park bulletin boards
  - At local churches
  - At local schools
- Web-based media outlets:
  - Encourage Education and Outreach Workgroup members to share information on their organizations' social media outlets, emails and/or newsletters. Additionally, local governments and other media outlets with a general public audience will be prioritized so that the receiving audience is not unintentionally targeted to a special interest.

### Frequency of Communications:

Outreach efforts are recommended, per organization, to proceed at the following frequency for each method of distribution:

- SaMS message distribution and testing: two times (one time for Step 1 and one time for Step 2). Step 1 will be distributed the week of November 18, 2019, and Step 2 will be distributed the week of December 9, 2019
- Listening session: one session held on December 3, 2019

### Timeframe

Two months: November – December 2019

Initiate the effort in November and end in December 2019. The timeframe was selected to overlap with the beginning of the winter season, when the topic of winter storms will be on the minds of the targeted audience. The information gathered will be used to refine and inform recommendations for inclusion into the final SaMS.

### Obstacles and/or Emergencies Encountered

Potential obstacles that may arise and proposed solution to address it are:

- Broken links or typographical errors in materials.
  - Inform DEQ contact, who will either correct the error or coordinate with the person who has access to correct the error.
- Misunderstanding and/or negative response to overarching SaMS message.
  - Distribution channels have the option to use the language provided below, or simply direct individuals to the DEQ contact.

- "We are participating in the SaMS because \_\_\_\_ [enter perspective] \_\_\_\_, but understand you may have concerns about the initiative in general. Please send your concerns/comments to [William.Isenberg@DEQ.Virginia.gov](mailto:William.Isenberg@DEQ.Virginia.gov)."

## Contacts

Education and Outreach Workgroup Member Contact:

Will Isenberg, DEQ

804-698-4228

[William.Isenberg@deq.virginia.gov](mailto:William.Isenberg@deq.virginia.gov)