

Council Memo



Date September 16, 2025
To City Council
From Councillor Rodrigo Goller
Subject A Motion for Provincial Leadership on Salt Management and Public Safety

This memo provides the context for the attached motion, which calls on the Province of Ontario to take a leadership role in addressing the growing environmental impact of road salt while ensuring public safety.

The Challenge: The Growing Threat of Salt Pollution

Road salt is a toxic substance under the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* for a reason: it poses a tangible threat to our environment and health. For decades, chloride levels have been rising in Ontario's groundwater, rivers, and lakes. This directly impacts our municipal responsibility for source water protection, as rising chloride levels in Guelph's source water—and across the province—make it harder and more costly to ensure safe drinking water. Despite 25 years of government guidelines and voluntary codes of practice, this problem continues to worsen, threatening both our aquatic ecosystems and our drinking water supplies.

Guelph's Leadership in Salt Management

The City of Guelph is a recognized leader in responsible salt management. Our staff are committed to protecting our watershed while keeping our roads, sidewalks, and facilities safe. Through advanced training, modern equipment, and a progressive Salt Management Plan, we continuously optimize our salt use for safety, cost-effectiveness, and environmental protection. This motion is a continuation of our city's commitment to finding sustainable solutions.

The Barrier: Unlimited Liability Drives Salt Overuse

A significant barrier to further salt reduction lies outside our direct control. The current system of unlimited liability for snow and ice contractors creates immense pressure to over-salt. Fear of costly slip-and-fall claims often leads contractors to apply salt far beyond what is considered best practice.

This issue has two major consequences: it harms our environment, and it creates an unsustainable business climate. Many contractors now struggle to find affordable insurance, forcing some to leave the industry altogether. This makes it harder for both municipalities and private property owners to secure essential winter maintenance services.

The Solution: A Provincial Framework for Safety and Sustainability

This motion advocates for a clear, consistent, and province-wide approach. We are asking the Province of Ontario to work with stakeholders to:

1. **Develop limited liability legislation** that is tied to enforceable, government-approved training, certification, and Best Management Practices (BMPs) for salt application.
2. **Create and fund an expert advisory committee** to guide the province and municipalities on protecting our freshwater resources from salt pollution.

By taking these steps, the province can create a system that protects contractors who follow best practices, ensures public safety, and significantly reduces the amount of salt entering our environment.

This motion is an opportunity for Guelph to lead the call for a sensible, province-wide solution that aligns with our city's long-standing commitment to environmental stewardship and public safety.

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