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WINTER STORMS COME WITH LONG-TERM ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Toronto – When residents and governments react to winter storms with toxic products applied to roads, sidewalks, and driveways, the impact on the environment includes significant long-term and expensive irreversible impacts, said Kevin Mercer, founding executive director of the RiverSides Stewardship Foundation, and a contributing author of the Government of Canada’s *Code of Practice for the Environmental Impact of Road Salts*.

“When toxic chloride-based de-icers and melters, such as road salt, are used by residents, business and governments, these chemicals do irreparable and expensive harm to Canada’s environment and infrastructure. Steps can easily be taken to minimize harm without compromising safety,” said Mercer.

The 2001 *Priority Substances List Assessment Report* from Health Canada and Environment Canada states that road salt use poses an immediate and long-term threat to drinking water, trees, and wildlife. Toxic road salt also costs taxpayers millions of dollars in unnecessary destruction every year. It permeates concrete, thus decreasing the lifespan and strength of structures, such as the Gardiner Expressway and parking garages, and corrodes metal used for sewers and bridges.

“The excessive destruction caused by toxic road salt is a tremendous financial burden on taxpayers. The US Environmental Protection Agency has estimated that for every tonne of road salt used, there is an additional \$750 in damage costs. For a homeowner, the driveway or walkway damage from a 10lb bag of salt can result in a repair bill costing thousands. There is an unnecessary tax burden on citizens and business to repair or replace premature infrastructure damage resulting from the use of a known toxic substance guaranteed to rot infrastructure and kill our valuable urban forest,” added Mercer.

Mercer said the best way to manage property or sidewalk snow clearing is to plow or shovel, before any product is applied unless using non-toxic anti-icers such as liquid CMA beforehand. Thereafter, a chloride-free product such as EcoTraction can be used to prevent slips and falls. For roads, it is essential that we reconsider the presumption that they must be absolutely clear to be safe. Bare pavement service levels, which can only be achieved with extensive use of salt, only encourage higher driving speeds, the true cause of winter accidents. Road authorities can switch to liquid CMA prior to storms and apply traction additives such as EcoTraction afterward instead of using salt.

RiverSides is an environmental non-profit organization committed to the protection of urban watersheds through education and pollution prevention at the homeowner and community level. This includes addressing the root causes of environmental destruction caused by toxic road salt. The organization was formed in 1995. Further details can be found at www.RiverSides.org

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