

Winter Water Quality Tips for Southwest Michigan

With the winter weather here it is a great time to stay indoors with family and enjoy the beauty of the season as the snow begins to fall. It is easy to forget about ways to protect our local waterways when it seems everything is frozen!

However, it is important to remember that streams and rivers continue to flow and the responsibility to maintain a healthy ecosystem does not end in the winter. When snow and ice melts, the salt goes with it, washing into our lakes, streams, wetlands, and groundwater. So, with winter here, consider the following tips to improve water quality in your local streams, rivers and Lake Michigan:

- ◆ Consider using **non-toxic de-icing substances** to melt ice. Chemical de-icers can be hazardous to your pets, birds, fish, trees, shrubs, and the environment. Chemical de-icers on driveways can pollute surface waters and groundwater through the soil. Consider natural alternatives such as biodegradable cat litter, sand, or fireplace ash.
- ◆ To reduce your use of de-icer chemicals, use physical methods such as snow shovels, ice crackers, and brooms to clear snow from your sidewalk, porch, or driveway.
- ◆ **Winterize your vehicle** by checking your air filter, fluid levels, windshield wipers, and tires for tread wear and proper inflation. Fix any leaks as oil, antifreeze and other fluids can pollute our local waterways. Ensuring your vehicle is ready for winter weather will keep you safe on the road and our waterways clean.
- ◆ If you have a wood-burning fireplace, **save your ashes** in a tin instead of throwing them away. Cold wood ashes can be mixed in your compost heap to create a valuable soil amendment that provides nutrients to your garden.



Winter is a special time to enjoy Michigan's unique water resources. Do your part this winter to ensure wildlife in and around our local streams and lakes will thrive in years to come.

- Learn more at: <http://www.letskeepitblue.org/>



