

Avoiding the Slippery Slope:

THREE ICE MELT MISTAKES AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

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Courtesy Housekeeping Solutions Magazine

Most people welcome the season's first snowfall. It is often associated with the start of the holidays, winter activities and breathtaking scenery, but rarely is it associated with safety and ice melt. Unless you are part of a custodial crew, who often perceive this winter wonderland as a mess...snow, ice, blizzard, thaw and refreeze.

Ice melters are necessary for certain climates. In fact, different climates and conditions require different ice melters. If you follow the tips and information below, you'll avoid three mistakes people make when choosing and using ice melting products.

MISTAKE 1

Waiting Until the Last Minute

Remember the story about the ant and the grasshopper? Well, the story of ice melters is similar. The time to think about ice melters isn't when the snow starts falling, but the truth is that many custodial crews are apparently more like the grasshopper when it comes to ice melters.

According to Don Kellermeyer, president of Kellermeyer Company in Toledo, Ohio, "When the snow starts to fall or on the first day of a big storm, the phone will ring off the hook."

He emphasizes that the time to think about ice melt is before you need it, preferably in the summer. Most distributors keep supplies on hand until the season is clearly over, but if cleaning departments haven't put in the order, you probably aren't going to be first on the list to get what you need.

In fact, most distributors advise customers to make arrangements with manufacturers or distributors that have "early-buy" programs and offer deals for booking early. Look for a company that doesn't require you to take all the stock up front, but will ensure that all your needs are

met.

Cleaning managers not only should buy ahead of time, they need to treat surfaces ahead of time. Ice melt will be much more effective if the surfaces are pretreated before an icing event.

The benefit of pretreating is that you won't need as much product in the long run because it prevents ice from bonding to the surface. Experts say that pretreatment also reduces the amount of ice melt needed as it is not necessary to bore through existing ice because it will have

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begun to melt at the surface prior to accumulation.

Manufacturers recommend applying ice melt before, during and at the end of ice storms. According to experts, depending on the outside temperature, snow falls and turns to ice immediately upon hitting the ground, or - if it's warmer outside - snow falls, melts, and turns to ice when temperatures fall. So, depending on the temperature, ice melt should be applied when the ice is beginning to form.

Staying on top of the situation means potential cost savings in terms of not only product, but also labor.

MISTAKE 2

Using the Wrong Product or Misusing the Correct One

Using the wrong product may result in unmelted ice, as well as overuse of product.

Experts comment that if you're using too much ice melter, you may have the wrong product. The rule here is: know thyself...or rather, know thy winter weather conditions. This is necessary when choosing the correct product.

One manufacturer commented that besides overuse, the biggest mistake most ice melt customers make is buying products which are not ideal for their specific ice melting needs.

Kellermeyer says that the mistake many customers make is thinking "all ice melters are the same," which is, of course, not true. There are a variety of ice melters. There's rock salt, calcium chloride, magnesium chloride, potassium chloride, urea, triple melts, and blends.

Kellermeyer says, "Each product does different things." Here's a hint, chances are, if you're overusing, it may very well be that you are using the wrong product.

When choosing a product, it's important to know that

each ice melt variety has its own unique melting temperature. That's why you need to choose a product geared to the weather conditions and temperatures in your area.

"Products such as salt, potassium chloride, urea, calcium chloride, and magnesium chloride...can be used in straight concentrations with each having its own unique eutectic (melting) temperature," says Kellermeyer. "Ice melt blends combine different concentrations of the above ingredients and are manufactured to melt ice and snow according to individual customers needs and climactic variables."

He explains, "The main difference between products such as salt or calcium chloride is the difference in melting temperatures. For example salt melts ice down to approximately 22 degrees, and

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calcium chloride can melt down to -35 degrees. Salt will melt for an extended period of time whereas calcium chloride will melt quickly but may need to be reapplied as it will runoff and become ineffective. Blended products use a combination of the above ingredients for maximum effectiveness."

For example, a custodial manager in a warmer climate bought the more expensive calcium chloride to melt ice. The added expense was unnecessary seeing as it will never approach the temperature range of -35 degrees. A salt based blend with a small addition of calcium or magnesium chloride would be more suitable.

The reverse situation would be a customer in a northern climate trying to use straight salt to melt ice when the temperature is below zero. In this situation, a ice melt blend that contains higher concentrations of calcium chloride or magnesium chloride would be preferable.

Custodial managers should choose a product based on how it will be used and the climactic needs of the area. But, experts say, some clients still choose their

ice melter based on what is cheapest, even though using the cheapest product available may not save departments money.

Kellermeyer, for example, says they sell a lot of rock salt. "It's the least costly ice melt to use but not cost effective." It may not do the job you need it to do and may require more product, which will end up costing more money.

Experts warn custodial managers who make purchases this way. Often times, you get what you pay for, and then some.

Some say that by using a cheap rock salt blend during the winter, departments are leaving the door open to expenditures for years to come in the form of repairs to landscaping, concrete and expensive floor finishes, not to mention the possible damage to waterways and surrounding ecosystems. Any short-term savings will be eclipsed by long-term expense, say experts.

MISTAKE 3

Improper Storage

Take care of your ice melt products so they can take care of you.

Experts emphasize that proper ice melter storage will depend on the composition of the product. A good rule of

thumb: Ice melters should be stored in airtight containers in humidity-controlled environments. In other words, keep them away from moisture and air.

According to experts, chlorides will draw moisture and will degrade and harden the ice melt product. But, if you have product left over at the end of the season, Kellermeyer says that as long as the bag hasn't been opened, you can leave it as is. Again, any open containers must be completely sealed as exposed ice melters attract moisture and can lead to a product that's akin to concrete.

Cleaning departments are also encouraged to keep bagged ice melt in air tight containers and covered with a dark wrap to keep the bags from becoming brittle from ultra violet exposure.

Suggested rules of storage for ice melters:

- + Protect them from humidity/moisture and sunlight.

- + Store them in the original or sealed bag - must be air tight.

So, order your ice melter ahead of time, make sure you get the one that's right for you, store it properly and enjoy a (relatively) hassle-free, ice-free winter season.

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