

Road salt good for winter driving, bad for wells

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(HealthDay)—The salt that makes icy roads safe in winter may not be so good for your drinking water, researchers report.

After testing the [salt content](#) of [water](#) in ponds and streams in the Baltimore area, scientists found sodium ([salt](#)) levels have been rising for the past few decades.

"Current stormwater management practices don't completely stop chemicals from reaching streams and we have seen chemical contamination year-round," said Joel Snodgrass, head of Virginia Tech's Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation.

This means that private wells in those areas can be contaminated, and they aren't the only water source at risk.

"Municipal water supplies may also become contaminated and require treatment to lower sodium and chloride levels before distribution,"

Snodgrass added in a Virginia Tech news release.

Excessive levels of salt in well water can make it unsafe for drinking. "People may end up [drinking water](#) containing [sodium levels](#) that exceed those recommended for people on low-sodium diets," Snodgrass said.

The look and taste of the water can also be affected. Some local governments are taking steps to reimburse residents for the cost of replacing contaminated water wells.

In addition, salt-contaminated runoff can end up in streams where it can harm wildlife, the researchers reported.

"You're basically putting these animals in a desert, because they can't regulate the salt in their bodies and get enough water to balance it out," Snodgrass said. "If salt levels continue to increase in freshwater areas, many fish and amphibians will stop breeding and eventually die because their bodies cannot adjust to the change."

The findings were published recently in the journal *Environmental Science and Technology*.

More information: The Association of State Drinking Water Administrators has more about [road salt and groundwater](#).

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