

EcoTraction co-founder Marc Appleby sprinkles his product on one of the Glebe's many snow covered sidewalks yesterday. EcoTraction claims to be a much more eco-friendly alternative to salting icy walkways.



DARREN CALABRESE/SUN MEDIA

Solving city salt intake

Local man claims product an eco-friendly alternative to infrastructure-corroding rock salt

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A local company says it's found the answer to a winter problem — one that could reduce the damaging effects of road salt to health, the environment and infrastructure.

Ottawa resident Mark Watson, co-founder of EcoTraction, has come up with a volcanic mineral-based alternative to the rock salt that municipalities pour on roads to melt ice and help with traction during the winter months.

"When you walk on ice, the EcoTraction absorbs that thin layer of water on the ice and imbeds itself in the ice to create a sandpaper effect," said Watson.

He said ordinary rock salt can be harmful not only to vehicles but also to your health. He founded the company in 2004 after suspecting his dog died from licking road salt.

"The thing with salt is, after it melts, where does it go? It dissolves into the water table, into our lakes and our rivers, and ultimately into our drink-

ingwater," he said. "You don't taste it, but it's there (sodium chloride). If you look at the laundry list of what's in our tap water it's quite frightening."

But beyond possible health issues, Watson said the alternate mixture can help municipalities to save valuable taxpayer dollars.

Weighing costs

Municipalities spread salt across wintry roads and sidewalks because it's cheap, but it has long-term and expensive results. Unlike typical

table salt, Watson says rock salt contains minerals and heavy metals such as lead and mercury.

"It's \$60 per ton," he said. "In the short-term it's the cheapest thing, but each ton of salt they put on the road causes about \$2,000 in damage."

Some city councillors would like the city to consider alternatives to rock salt.

Capital Coun. Clive Doucet said rock salt is tough on the city's infrastructure because it has a tendency to rust pipes.

"We've got to get rid of it,"

said Doucet. "It's got to be terribly corrosive for our pipes."

Gloucester-South Nepean Coun. Steve Desroches said he's open to looking at alternatives.

He said when the city recently rationed salt because of a shortage, it began using a mixture of salt and grit on roads.

"Maybe this was an unintentional pilot project," he said. "We should be investigating innovative technologies."

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