

News and information for Friday, December 17, 2004

## **Environmentally friendly deicer makes Valley debut**

BY CHERYL G. WILSON

WINTER begins on Tuesday, and many people are dreading the snow and sleet, slippery sidewalks and parking lots, dripping gutters and sand tracked into the house.

Gardeners worry about salt and sand damage to lawns and shrubs, and they wince at the thought of all those pine trees along the interstate highways that will sport brown needles in the spring.

A local landscaper is touting a new alternative to sodium chloride - the salt used on roadways - and treated sand.

The product is called Liquid Magic or Magic Salt, and some area public works departments have been using it for a few years. Out West, in Idaho and Montana, it's been a staple for road deicing for nearly a decade.

"It's like spraying Pam on a frying pan," explained Jon Hancock of Spring Valley Landscaping in Hatfield, the New England distributor for the product. A tank truck - or, for the homeowner, a portable backpack sprayer - applies the liquid just before a predicted storm. The liquid seeps into the pores of the asphalt street, driveway or sidewalk and prevents black ice from forming as well as snow from bonding to the pavement. The result is a clear surface that looks like summer. Hancock calls it "June pavement."

The liquid consists of magnesium chloride and a vegetable agricultural byproduct, generally from distilleries. Hancock said it originated in Eastern Europe, where a distiller was trying to find a market for the waste from his alcohol production. He patented his idea and exported it.

Hancock said he knew that area public works departments were using Liquid Magic, but he didn't know how to get some himself. "It's like a secret," he said. "Consumers don't know about it."

Then, a couple of years ago, one of the employees of Brockway-Smith, a Hatfield company for whom Hancock plows the parking lots, saw a booth at a trade show and linked Hancock to John Oakes of Taconic Maintenance in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. Oakes arranged for Hancock to try out Liquid Magic last year.



Jon Hancock, right, of Spring Valley Landscaping in Hatfield, is the New England distributor for a new alternative to salt and treated sand for deicing. Liquid Magic and Magic Salt are environmentally friendly deicers made from magnesium chloride and a vegetable agricultural byproduct. At left is sales representative John Oakes.

Hancock used the anti-icing liquid on the parking lots he plows at condominiums like Amity Place in Amherst and The Gables and Pheasant Hill in Northampton. He also used it on commercial parking lots and for his 300 residential customers. Now he is an official distributor, and he is selling the product to other landscape contractors as well as to organizations like Cooley Dickinson Hospital in Northampton.

"We proved that stuff works and works well," Hancock said.

"We want to be on the leading edge," he added. So, in addition to becoming the area distributor for landscape contractors, Hancock has also managed to get small bags of the granular Magic Salt to be available to homeowners at stores like the Cook Builder's Supply Co. in Easthampton and West Springfield and Agway in Greenfield. Magic Salt sells for \$14.99 for a 50-pound bag, he said.

Magic Salt is the same product as Liquid Magic, only in granular form, and it can be applied in place of sodium chloride-treated sand after a storm. The magnesium chloride lowers the temperature at which snow will melt and thus hastens melt below freezing.

One gallon of the liquid will cover 2,000 square feet, Hancock said. It will last on the driveway or sidewalk between storms, not washing away like regular sodium chloride or sand that clogs sewer drains.

For the homeowner who hires a contractor using Liquid Magic or chooses to use Magic Salt for sidewalks, a definite benefit is evident in the spring: Lawns edging driveways, streets and sidewalks won't turn brown, Hancock said.

"It's environmentally friendly," he said.

### **The problem with sand**

Sand has also been a problem for highway superintendents, landscape contractors and homeowners. All have relied on treated sand to reduce slippery conditions, including black ice. "There is just way too much sand being used," Hancock said.

The problem is that the sand has to be swept up in the springtime, a costly operation. Also, sand treated with sodium chloride builds up on lawn edges over the winter and kills the grass come spring.

Not so with the magnesium chloride solution, Hancock maintains. "I sprayed it on my lawn last spring and it greened it up," he said.

Hancock's customers say they have been happy with Liquid Magic. "The lack of sand for us has been the biggest benefit," said Jamie Cherewatti, president of Eaglecrest Property Management in Amherst. Hancock tested Liquid Magic last year at Salem Place, which is among the 12 condominium complexes managed by Cherewatti.

"He only used it for half of the winter last year," Cherewatti said. "This winter is the big rollout."

Ask your snowplow contractor if he or she is using Liquid Magic, and consider using Magic Salt instead of treated sand on your sidewalks.

Cheryl B. Wilson can be reached at [cwilson@gazettenet.com](mailto:cwilson@gazettenet.com).