

Magic Salt melts away winter woes

By Mark D. Marotta, Staff Writer
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Although the snowfall these days may be fast and furious, Upper Moreland businessman John Stenger thinks he can offer a solution.

Along with partner Bob Young, Stenger is co-owner of Environmental Solutions Inc., the area's exclusive distributor of Magic Salt, an ice- and snow-melting product manufactured by Innovative Municipal United States, of Rome, N. Y.

Stenger explained that Magic Salt combines liquid magnesium chloride with distillery soluble left as waste from the production of beer, whiskey, vodka and rum. He added that the manufacturer does not disclose the breweries from which the waste product comes, but that the material from only about four facilities worldwide seems to work well.

Tanker trucks deliver 4,500-gallon shipments of liquid to Environmental Solutions, which then sprays it onto rock salt, Stenger said. While the application to salt sometimes takes place at the company's Wyandotte Road facility, it more often happens at a customer's site, or on large piles of salt stored at ports in Wilmington, Morrisville or Camden.

Stenger maintained that Magic Salt works "a lot quicker" than alternatives. While all chlorides need contact with liquid in order to melt ice, magnesium and calcium can draw moisture from the air, and therefore can start to work immediately, he said.

"I've taken a decent amount of courses on ice-melt product," Stenger said. He added that he also had chemists' reports explaining how Magic Salt works.

Stenger acknowledged that Magic Salt is more expensive than untreated rock salt, which currently

costs \$55 per ton. Treating the salt with the liquid adds a cost of \$26 per ton, he said.

However, Stenger pointed out, using the product can reduce the amount of rock salt needed by as much as 50 percent. As temperatures drop, he noted, rock salt tends to become less efficient, so more has to be used. By contrast, Stenger claimed Magic Salt works at temperatures as low as minus 40 degrees. In recent years, temperatures dropped noticeably during snowstorms, he added.

According to Stenger, Magic Salt is "environmentally friendly, [and] safe for pets." He said the distillery waste could also be used as cattle feed.

Stenger added that he first heard of Magic Salt 10 years ago. As a snow removal contractor, he recounted, he was "very interested in the liquid," but found that New York was the closest place to get it.

Now, his company, which has six full-time employees and several seasonal workers, sells Magic Salt to customers in Philadelphia, Bucks, Montgomery and Delaware counties in Pennsylvania, Camden and Burlington counties in New Jersey, and New Castle County in Delaware.

Municipalities and snow removal contractors are usually the product's end users, Stenger said. However, he added, homeowners periodically show up at Environmental Solutions to buy bags of Magic Salt. Stenger explained that small contractors and private schools also purchase the bags, which are produced in Canada.

Stenger said his company is in discussions with some retail stores about having them sell Magic Salt, and is also working on providing the product to the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority and Philadelphia public schools.

Environmental Solutions also provides services to suppress dust at locations such as horse arenas, quarries and roads, and also is a snow removal equipment dealer, Stenger added.