



## Frequently Asked Questions: Road anti-icing, pre-treatment and de-icing

### WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ANTI-ICING, PRE-TREATMENT, PRE-WETTING AND DE-ICING?

- **Anti-icing** – The application of chemicals to roads before a snow-pavement bond occurs. Anti-icing emphasizes prevention rather than reaction.
- **Pre-treatment** – A form of anti-icing where chemicals are applied to the road up to 48 hours before a winter storm to prevent a bond from forming between the pavement and the snow and ice when the storm starts.
- **De-icing** – The practice of removing snow or ice once it has bonded to the pavement. This involves plowing and continual application of chemicals and abrasives. Plowing generally begins when an inch or more of snow has accumulated on the road.
- **Pre-wetting** – Involves treating the dry de-icing chemicals with liquids before they are applied to the roadway as part of the deicing efforts. This accelerates the activation of the chemicals before they are applied to the road. Pre-wetted chemicals are not typically applied to roads before snow or ice accumulate.

### WHAT CHEMICALS ARE USED IN ANTI-ICING AND DE-ICING?

Sodium chloride (salt), magnesium chloride, calcium chloride, calcium magnesium acetate and potassium acetate are chemicals used to prevent and remove snow and ice from roadways. VDOT uses liquid magnesium chloride, calcium chloride and sodium chloride for anti-icing and pre-treatment. Sodium chloride and calcium chloride in dry form are used for de-icing but can be used in some cases for anti-icing.

**Sodium Chloride (salt)** – Dry sodium chloride is VDOT's primary snow-removal and ice-control chemical. It is applied directly to the pavement once the storm starts. Salt is sometimes mixed with sand before it is applied to the road. Dry salt is most effective after the snow has accumulated about an inch and the temperature is 20 degrees Fahrenheit or higher. If the temperature is below 20 degrees, salt may not melt enough snow and ice to form a barrier between the pavement and the snow and could even produce more ice as melted snow refreezes. At these temperatures, abrasives such as sand are put down to break up ice and increase traction. Liquid sodium chloride (brine) is an economical anti-icing and pre-treatment chemical.

#### **Magnesium Chloride and Calcium Chloride** –

These products can melt ice at lower temperatures than salt. Both chemicals in liquid form can be used for anti-icing. In its dry form, calcium chloride is used only as a de-icer.

### WHEN AND WHERE WILL VDOT USE ANTI-ICING?

VDOT may use anti-icing when snow or an ice storm is predicted and when pavement temperatures are above 20 degrees Fahrenheit. Anticipated temperature and type of precipitation at the start of a storm will determine its use.

VDOT's anti-icing program covers at least 200 miles of roads in each of its nine districts. VDOT also deploys anti-icing crews to major bridges, overpasses and areas prone to freezing to keep ice from forming.

### WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I DRIVE UP ON A VDOT ANTI-ICING TRUCK?

Anti-icing equipment will appear all across the commonwealth this year. If you see an anti-icing crew spraying chemicals on the road, slow down. For proper application, crews will be driving slower than highway speeds. Do not follow the trucks too closely, as the chemicals are slightly slippery for the first 30 to 45 seconds they are on the pavement. If you must pass an anti-icing truck, do so carefully.

It is a good idea to wash your vehicle if it comes into contact with these chemicals to protect its finish.

### WHAT IS BLACK ICE?

Black ice, also known as "glare ice" or "clear ice," refers to a thin coating of glazed ice on road. While not truly black, it is transparent, allowing you to see the asphalt pavement through it. Black ice often occurs along with wet roads, making it hard to see and especially hazardous for driving or walking.

### WHAT AREAS ARE MORE PRONE TO HAVE ICE?

Ice can form sooner on the decks of bridges and overpasses before it does on the roadway because air can circulate both above and below the surface of the elevated roadway, causing the pavement temperature to drop more rapidly. Ice can also form in shaded areas. Motorists should always use caution and expect slippery conditions when driving during winter weather.