

Please don't PASS THE SALT!



What is salinity?

Salinity (salt) in water is a measure of dissolved mineral salts such as calcium, magnesium, potassium, sodium, sulfate, and chloride. All water supplies naturally contain some salt, but agricultural, industrial and residential water users often add more salt to the water they use.

At home, for example, the use of water softeners, detergents, cleaning products, liquid fabric softeners, soaps and shampoos all add salt to your wastewater. This salt-laden water then flows through the sewer system to the wastewater treatment facility. Because salt is already dissolved when it arrives at the treatment facility, it cannot be effectively removed by the current wastewater treatment process. As a result, much of the salt simply passes through to the Mississippi River.



➤ Mississippi River, Otsego Regional Park

Why is salinity a problem in the City of Otsego?

Too much salt in our wastewater can affect sensitive ecosystems and degrade the quality of our water supply for drinking, farming, industry and recreation. Unfortunately, high levels of salt in our wastewater may result in regulatory-mandated treatment improvements. Installing costly upgrades at the treatment facility to remove excess salt would result in significantly increased rates for users.

Therefore, it is important for all of us to take simple measures to decrease the salinity in our wastewater.

THESE MEASURES WILL HELP US:

- Protect the environment and aquatic life
- Avoid costly regulatory fines or upgrades to the treatment facilities resulting in higher water and sewer rates
- Extend the life of your home's water pipes, appliances and equipment
- Preserve water quality for potential re-use
(high salinity levels limit water resource management options and the ability to use reclaimed water in the future)



How you can help

A few simple changes in your household can help significantly reduce the salinity in the Mississippi River.

HOUSEHOLD CLEANERS

- ❑ Use **environmentally-friendly cleaning products** with no phosphates, chlorine, sodium, artificial colors or fragrances
- ❑ Use **dryer sheets** instead of liquid fabric softener
- ❑ Use **liquid dishwasher and laundry detergents** instead of powders
- ❑ **Minimize use of cleaning products** or try natural cleaning products such as vinegar, baking soda and lemon.

WATER SOFTENERS

The overuse of water softeners is often a major cause of salinity in wastewater. Many water softeners cycle more frequently than necessary, with each recharge cycle flushing pounds of used salt into the sewer.

- ❑ **Reduce your water use** – the less water you treat, the less salt you put down the drain
- ❑ **Check your settings** to make sure they are optimal for our hardness levels (*Otsego's municipal water supply has an average hardness level of 15 grains per gallon*)
- ❑ Change from a timer-based to a **demand-based softener** (one that recharges only when needed, based on water use)
- ❑ If your softener is timer-based, make sure it **recharges at the lowest effective rate**, and turn it off when you go on vacation
- ❑ **Consider whether a water softener is even needed** in your household; you might be able to go without your softener and avoid the ongoing expenses for its operations and maintenance
- ❑ **Consider other alternatives** to salt-based water softeners

➤ WATER TREATMENT

Once salt is in the water, it is not effectively removed and expensive to treat.

City of Otsego ordinance for water softeners installed after January 1, 2022:
https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/otsegomn/latest/otsego_mn/0-0-0-15203

➤ INCREASE IN SEWER RATES

High levels of salt in wastewater may result in regulatory mandated treatment improvements that would result in increased sewer rates.

<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/skinny-water-softeners>

➤ WATER SOFTENER SAVINGS!

You can save money on softener salt, electricity and water by not operating your water softener as frequently.



Questions?

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