



MARKETING SOLUTIONS
"Building Resilient Brands!"



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Market Research Report - Draft

HENNEPIN COUNTY CHLORIDE INITIATIVE

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Executive Summary

- **Condo and townhome association board members** make the decisions about winter maintenance in condo and townhome associations.
 - Safety and cost are the top drivers for these decision makers.
 - Protecting the environment, asphalt/concrete, landscaping/lawns, and carpeting/floors are additional, but secondary considerations.
 - Concerns about liability are fundamentally concerns about safety.
 - Coping with problem areas causes greater salt use.
- **Faith community facilities managers** make the decisions about winter maintenance in faith communities.
 - Safety and protecting the environment are the top drivers for these decision makers. Protecting the environment was sometimes framed as “protecting God’s creation.”
 - Lowering cost, protecting asphalt/concrete, landscaping/lawns, and carpeting/floors are additional, but secondary considerations.
 - Concerns about liability are fundamentally concerns about safety.
 - Coping with problem areas causes greater salt use.
- **Property managers** advise many of their clients about winter maintenance.
 - Cost, safety, and concerns about liability are the top drivers for this audience. Ensuring safety and mitigating liability are linked concerns.
 - Protecting asphalt/concrete, landscaping/lawns, and carpeting/floors are additional, but secondary considerations.
- **Message building blocks across all audiences include:**
 - *Emphasize ensuring safety.* It is important that this is communicated as HCCI’s central focus; it is the primary reason for salting across all audiences.
 - Highlight the parallel benefits of minimizing cost and protecting the environment.
 - Include, but don’t prioritize, discussion of protecting asphalt/concrete, landscaping/lawns, carpets/floors, and pet paws.
 - Recommend practical alternatives and best practices. Provide written “how-to” information about dealing with different problem areas.
 - Persuade with examples of associations and faith communities that have been successful minimizing salt use.
 - Inform about programs available to subsidize the cost of abatement measures (such as water diversion loans/grants) (written handout).
 - Forego discussion of liability unless a) Smart Salting legislation becomes law, or b) the audience raises the issue (be prepared to respond). If discussed, express understanding and compassion for their concerns, and emphasize that safety can be protected while minimizing salt use.

Complete research findings are detailed in the attached report.

Project Background

Deicing salts are commonly used in Northern climates to improve winter safety and improve driving and walking conditions. The overuse of these deicing salts (chlorides) has accelerated in recent years, and has had a negative impact on rivers, streams, lakes, and other water resources, including drinking water. It only takes one teaspoon of salt to permanently pollute just five gallons of water such that it can no longer harbor freshwater aquatic life. Salt also causes premature and expensive damage to property including impacts to infrastructure, landscaping, and flooring. Once in the environment, there are limited options for treating or removing chloride from waters or soils; the most effective control is simply to use less.

As this issue has come to the forefront in the past few decades, cold-weather states, cities, counties, and other public institutions have taken numerous actions to limit the amount of road salt applied to streets and highways to the bare minimum needed. However, on private properties, extra salt is routinely overapplied to roadways, parking lots, and walks, usually to demonstrate that care was taken on property. Although some salt is needed to maintain a safe winter environment, overuse has become a strategy to protect a property from liability lawsuits. We are seeking to educate homeowners' associations and faith-based organizations that more salt does not equal higher levels of safety, and that it does result in harm to the environment. In turn, we want them to reduce requests for over-salting made by these groups to their property management companies.

The Hennepin County Chloride Initiative (HCCI) is a collaborative of all eleven watershed organizations in Hennepin County, the county, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and many cities from across the county. HCCI's goal is to reduce the amount of chloride entering our waterways from the overuse of winter deicing materials. While each of the HCCI members work in their own jurisdictions on this issue, the HCCI project uses Clean Water Funds through a state grant to collectively address this issue by pooling ideas and resources and promoting common messages and strategies, with an emphasis on private property owners and managers, from large retail centers to small properties or residences.

HCCI contracted with MP+G Marketing Solutions to conduct audience research and develop a campaign for outreach to townhome and condominium boards and faith communities to promote best practices for minimizing salt use.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the research is to better understand the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, policies, and other factors that increase willingness to adopt Smart Salting practices among homeowners' associations, faith-based organizations, and property management companies, as well as those factors that decrease willingness. In addition, we are seeking insights into the communication messages, methods and engagement tools that might increase or decrease willingness among the target audiences.

Research Approach

Qualitative data was collected through a series of interviews with board members of homeowners' associations, board members (or facilities managers) of faith-based organizations, and property managers at property management companies. Secondary research is also being conducted into promising programs, methods, and messages found at existing Hennepin County initiatives at HCCI member organizations, as well as other water quality programs; secondary research will be incorporated into the development of program branding, presentations, and materials.

The data was analyzed for themes, potential messages, messengers, and other factors influencing decisions of use of deicing salt. The findings are presented in this report.

Limitations of the Research

The research is qualitative and descriptive, not quantitative, so results cannot be measured or extrapolated. Research participants were identified through networking and participated by selective invitation, and are therefore participation was not randomized.

Participants

Research participants were identified and recruited through HCCI with assistance from MP+G Marketing Solutions. Participation was voluntary. Interviewees were given a \$25 gift card as a token of appreciation for their time.

- **Townhome and condominium association board members.** Eight board members participated in interviews.
- **Faith community members.** Five faith community members participated; this group was the hardest to reach and recruit.
- **Property managers.** Five property managers were interviewed.

How Decisions are Made

Decisions: Townhome and Condominium Associations

Townhome and condominium association board members who participated said that board members at their associations make the decisions about winter maintenance vendors and practices. In some instances, they consult and/or get bids through their property management company.

Only rarely do homeowners directly influence the decision-making at these associations; when residents have concerns about icy conditions in problem areas or snow removal, they most often interact with the property management company, or association maintenance person. Comments from homeowners include both compliments and criticism.

Some associations have buckets of salt and/or sand near problem areas where homeowners are free to apply it.

The majority of these participants said that winter maintenance is discussed and decided (contracts signed) in September and October. Snow removal and lawn care are often handled by the same contractor and so in some associations the discussion and contract signing happens in March and April.

Decisions: Faith Communities

Faith community facilities managers who participated (often parish members who are volunteers, or the pastor) said that they make the decisions about winter maintenance vendors and practices. In some instances, they consult with internal committees (e.g., operations, grounds, or environment) or their internal maintenance supervisor.

Parishioners in these communities do not participate in the decisions; when parishioners have concerns about icy conditions in problem areas or snow removal, they alert the facilities manager or building janitorial staff. Comments from parishioners include both compliments and criticism.

A few parishes reported they have buckets of salt and/or sand near problem areas where parishioners could apply it, but people are more likely to alert building maintenance.

No pattern was observed among faith community participants as to when winter maintenance is discussed and decided.

Decisions: Property Managers

Note: Two of five interviewees had many years of experience managing hundreds of townhome and condominium associations. Their responses have been preferentially weighted in this analysis.

Three of five property managers who participated said that they make the decisions about winter maintenance vendors and practices. Two of five said the association board makes the decisions, often with advice or recommendations from the property manager.

These respondents said residents in these communities do not participate in the decisions, but do influence them by complaining (e.g., prompting a change of vendors). When residents have concerns about icy conditions in problem areas or snow removal, they alert the property managers or, occasionally, the snow removal contractors.

One property manager who has managed hundreds of associations said condominiums are more likely to have buckets of salt and/or sand for resident use near entrances or problem areas than are townhome associations. He said lawn care and snow removal contracts go hand-in-hand; decisions about contracts are made in spring and fall.

Decision Drivers

Drivers: Townhome and Condominium Associations

For these participants, decisions are driven by two main factors:

- **Safety.** More than half of these participants said protecting residents from accident and injury was a deciding factor, as important, or for some, more important than cost.
- **Cost.** Most participants were mindful of the increased cost the association pays when salt is applied in their complex; they want to be good fiscal stewards. Keeping costs down was frequently mentioned as a benefit to minimizing salt use.

If we need to pay a bit more to do the right thing—protect the residents—we'll do that.

Association board member

Monetary cost, however, was not the only factor they considered; participants also saw a “cost” to safety with unsafe conditions. Similarly, a few spoke of the cost to the environment of salt use.

The interviewers asked questions about several other factors:

- **Protecting the environment.** The harmful effects of salt on water resources and drinking water were top-of-mind for only two of eight participants. Knowledge about connections between salt and harm to the environment varied, with most having only a general idea that “it’s bad.” When prompted, four of eight said it was important to consider environmental impact.
- **Protecting asphalt/concrete and lawns/landscaping.** This was mentioned by three of eight association board members.
- **Protecting carpets/floors.** Four of eight people mentioned this.
- **Mitigating liability.** There was some general concern about liability protection as stewards of their communities (e.g., making sure they carried enough insurance), but preventing slips and falls and ensuring resident safety was of greater concern.
- **Problem areas.** Coping with problem areas, such as icy sidewalks, was a specific reason for a lot of salt use.

Drivers: Faith Communities

For these participants, decisions are driven by two main factors:

- **Safety.** All five of these participants said they have many elderly people in their congregations and they are concerned for their safety. They have either had cases of slips and falls, or are worried they will.
- **Protecting the environment.** The harmful effects of salt on water resources and drinking water were important to all five faith community interviewees. Knowledge levels about the connections between salt and harm to the environment were high. Protecting the environment was sometimes framed as “protecting God’s creation.”



If there were non-polluting substitutes, we would pay the extra money; I know we would.

Faith community participant

The interviewers asked questions about several other factors:

- **Cost.** Three of five faith community participants listed cost as a concern. Monetary cost, however, was not the only factor they considered; participants also saw a “cost” to safety inherent in unsafe conditions. Similarly, a few spoke of the cost to the environment of salt use.
- **Mitigating liability.** When prompted, four of these participants had heightened concern about liability. Researchers infer this may be connected to concern for the elderly populations they serve; preventing slips and falls was a key concern.
- **Protecting asphalt/concrete and lawns/landscaping.** This was mentioned by four of five faith community members. This was tied to concern for the environment as several had rain gardens and/or were protective of waterways or natural areas near their place of worship.
- **Protecting carpets/floors.** Two of five people mentioned this. For those two people, salt on carpets and floors was a major headache.
- **Problem areas.** Coping with problem areas, such as icy stairs, was a specific reason for a lot of salt use.

Drivers: Property Managers

For these participants, decisions are driven by two main factors:

- **Cost.** Interviewees said keeping costs down is a major consideration for association boards managed by professional property management companies. An experienced property manager observed that inflation and labor shortages will affect decision-making in the next year; he expects costs to go up 10 percent or more.
- **Safety and liability.** Ensuring safety and mitigating liability are *linked concerns* for this audience.



Associations are required [in their governing documents] to maintain health and safety, so if that means throwing buckets of salt down, they're going to do it.

Property manager participant

The interviewers asked questions about several other factors:

- **Protecting the environment.** The harmful effects of salt on water resources and drinking water were generally not part of the decision-making process for these property managers. One experienced property manager

observed that board members who prioritize environmental concerns come and go; boards turn over, so this may be very important one year, and of little importance the next. Knowledge levels about the connections between salt and harm to the environment in this group were moderately high.

- **Protecting asphalt/concrete and lawns/landscaping.** All of these property managers mentioned wear and tear on asphalt/concrete and lawns/landscaping as being of concern to the associations they serve.
- **Protecting carpets/floors.** Four of five people mentioned this.

Trusted Advisors

Advisors: Townhome and Condominium Associations

Trusted advisors have the potential to become messengers and partners.

- **Property management company.** Six of eight townhome and condominium association board members turn to their property management company for advice. Two mentioned association management trainings or online information offered through their property management companies: [Omega](#) and [Associa](#) were specifically mentioned.
- **Attorneys.** Two of eight participants had attorneys they consulted directly. Several others mentioned using the attorney with the property management company.
- **Insurance company.** Two of eight participants turn to insurance companies for advice about property management.
- **Professional associations.** Two association members mentioned belonging to professional associations—[Community Associations Institute Minnesota Chapter](#) and Minnesota Common Ground (?)—that advised about winter maintenance.
- **Publications and media.** Two association members said they follow publications, namely those put out by Community Associations Institute, and the City of Plymouth.
- **City, county, and watershed districts.** Two participants mentioned the city, county, and/or watershed district as trusted advisors. No negative comments were made about government agencies.
- **“Green team” committee or individual.** None of these participants mentioned this.

Advisors: Faith Communities

- **“Green team” committee or individual.** Three of five members of this audience said their faith community has an environmental committee or active individuals.
- **Attorneys.** Three of five participants had attorneys they consulted directly; all three reported the attorneys were members of the congregation.
- **Property management company.** One of five faith community members mentioned getting advice from their property management company.
- **Insurance company.** One participant turned to an insurance company for advice about winter maintenance.
- **Professional associations.** One of these participants mentioned belonging to a professional association (other than the parent church or temple): [Minnesota Association of Church Facility Management](#) (for all faiths).
- **City, county, and watershed districts.** One participant mentioned the city, county, and/or watershed district as trusted advisors. No negative comments were made about government agencies.
- **Publications and media.** No faith community participants said they follow publications or media.

Advisors: Property Management Companies

- **Publications and media.** Four mentioned following publications, put out by Community Associations Institute, and City of Edina. The Executive Director at CAI-MN also mentioned two radio programs hosted by property managers (but did not know the stations): [Gene Sullivan at New Concepts](#), and Kyle Miller of All-Around Construction (researchers tracked this down as the Structure Tech podcast).
- **Insurance company.** Three of five property managers turn to insurance companies for advice about winter maintenance. One long-time property manager said insurance companies will get involved and dictate snow and ice removal policies if they do an inspection and find major problems.
- **Professional associations.** Three of five property managers mentioned membership in [Community Associations Institute - Minnesota Chapter](#) that advised about winter maintenance, and one is Executive Director of CAI-MN.
- **City, county, and watershed districts.** Three participants mentioned the city, county, and/or watershed district as trusted advisors. No negative comments were made about government agencies.
- **Attorneys.** No property managers mentioned consulting attorneys, yet property management companies routinely have attorneys on retainer or on

staff (and this was mentioned by HOA members); often they are specialists in community association law.

- **“Green team” committee or individual.** None of these participants mentioned this.

Message Building Blocks

Messaging: Townhome and Condominium Associations

- Emphasize ensuring safety while lowering cost.
- Include, but don’t prioritize, discussion of protecting the environment, asphalt/concrete, landscaping/lawns, carpets/floors, and pet paws.
- Recommend practical alternatives and best practices. Provide written “how-to” information about dealing with different types of problem areas.
- Persuade with examples of other associations that have been successful minimizing salt use.
- Inform about programs available to subsidize the cost of abatement measures (such as water diversion loans/grants) (written handout).
- Forego discussion of liability unless a) Smart Salting legislation becomes law, or b) the audience raises the issue (be prepared to respond). If discussed, express understanding and compassion for their concerns, and emphasize that safety can be protected while minimizing salt use.

More on an improved product that will have less detrimental effects, and its cost.

Association board member

Messaging: Faith Communities

- Emphasize ensuring safety while protecting the environment (discuss their building’s proximity to water resources where applicable). Express concern for the safety of all parishioners, but especially older adults.

When they hear about less salt, they worry about safety. Safe and environmentally responsible—that’s a win, win.

Faith community participant

- Include, but don't prioritize, discussion of minimizing cost, and protecting carpets/floors, asphalt/concrete, and landscaping/lawns.
- Recommend practical alternatives and best practices. Provide written "how-to" information about dealing with different types of problem areas.
- Persuade with examples of other faith organizations that have been successful minimizing salt use.
- Inform about programs available to subsidize the cost of abatement measures (such as stormwater diversion loans/grants) (written handout).
- Forego discussion of liability unless a) Smart Salting legislation becomes law, or b) the audience raises the issue (be prepared to respond). If discussed, express understanding and compassion for their concerns, and emphasize that safety can be protected while minimizing salt use.

Messaging: Property Managers

- Emphasize minimizing costs while protecting resident safety and guarding against liability. When liability is discussed, express understanding and compassion for their concerns, and emphasize that safety can be protected while minimizing salt use.
- Include, but don't prioritize, discussion of protecting the environment, asphalt/concrete, landscaping/lawns, and carpets/floors.
- Recommend practical alternatives and best practices. Provide written "how-to" information about dealing with different types of problem areas.
- Persuade with examples of associations and their property management providers that have been successful minimizing salt use.
- Inform about programs available to their clients to subsidize the cost of abatement measures (such as stormwater diversion loans/grants) (written handout).

Messaging: Across All Audiences

- *Emphasize ensuring safety.* It is important that this is communicated as HCCI's central focus; it is the primary reason for salting across all audiences.
- Highlight the parallel benefits of minimizing cost and protecting the environment.
- Include, but don't prioritize, discussion of protecting asphalt/concrete, landscaping/lawns, carpets/floors, and pet paws.
- Recommend practical alternatives and best practices. Provide written "how-to" information about dealing with different types of problem areas.
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- Forego discussion of liability unless a) Smart Salting legislation becomes law, or b) the audience raises the issue (be prepared to respond). If discussed, express understanding and compassion for their concerns, and emphasize that safety can be protected while minimizing salt use.

Recommended Messengers

Messengers: Townhome and Condominium Associations

Recommended messengers for reaching townhome and condominium association members include property managers, board members at other associations, and local government.

Messengers: Faith Communities

Recommended messengers for reaching faith community members include parishioners who are also advisors (including attorneys and “green team” committee members), representatives from other parishes, the [Minnesota Association of Church Facilities Management](#), and local government.

Messengers: Property Managers

Recommended messengers for reaching property managers include Community Associations Institute, the [Minnesota Multi-Housing Association](#), other property managers, and local government.

Preferred Communication Channels

Across all audiences, email was the preferred way to contact them. Some said phone was a good way to reach them. Some wanted to receive a mailing or flyer. Several mentioned the appeal of videos.

Quite a few homeowners’ association and faith community participants offered to host neighborhood meetings for reaching the broader community.

Direct outreach to townhome and condominium association board members and faith community facilities managers is recommended and will likely be welcomed.

Publications or sites that may be useful for communicating with these audiences include (but are not limited to) the Community Associations Institute-Minnesota Chapter magazine (*Minnesota Community Living*, published quarterly), the [Minnesota Multi-Housing Association](#), the [Minnesota Association of Church Facility Management](#), and city government and watershed district websites and newsletters.

Presentations and Outreach

Across all audiences, these participants were open to having HCCI meet with them to do a presentation; some were enthusiastic; some wanted to be reassured the presentation would contain new information and strategies.

- Most recommended presentations of 15-30 minutes, including time for questions. A few recommended presentations of up to an hour; longer presentations may be more feasible with property managers.
- Several stressed that presenters needed to be familiar with *their* situation, *their* ongoing problem areas (and offer solutions), and *their* mitigation efforts before presenting. This suggests the need for a brief pre-presentation interview.
- A number of townhome/condo and faith community interviewees envisioned offering a meeting to their whole community, and several offered space to do so. One of the property managers said he was also open to arranging presentations for communities the company manages.
- Several people mentioned the appeal of a video, 5 or 6 minutes long, as part of the presentation.
- Concentrate presentations in August, September, and October, and February, March, and April.
- Zoom meetings are the recommended presentation venue. Many boards already meet this way; Zoom facilitates PowerPoint presentations; association boards typically don't have a community meeting facility (pre-Covid most met in board members' homes); and Zoom is often the only forum available during the pandemic.

With Gratitude

This research would not have been possible without the generous cooperation of research participants, to whom we are very grateful.