ENVIRONMENTAL
Fact Sheet

NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF Environmental Services

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Snow Disposal Guidelines

Introduction

Each winter, the Department of Environmental Services receives numerous complaints related to snow disposal into and/or near surface water. There are several different concerns regarding disposal of snow cleared from streets and parking lots ranging from aesthetic concerns, such as minimizing the visibility of debris and huge snow piles, to environmental concerns, such as protection of groundwater quality, drinking water supplies, surface water quality and aquatic life.

The environmental impacts of disposed snow result from high levels of salt, sand, debris and trash, along with contaminants from automobiles including oil and exhaust. The debris and contaminants that inevitably end up in plowed snow make it illegal to dump snow directly into water bodies. RSA 485-A:13,I(a) prohibits discharging wastes to surface waters without a permit. In addition to water quality impacts, snow disposed in open water can cause dangerous ice jams.

Manchester NH sign prohibiting snow dumping. Photo: Robert Robinson, City of Manchester

Groundwater is sensitive to snow dumping due to the high levels of chloride and automotive waste in plowed snow. RSA 485-C:12 prohibits the siting or operation of snow dumps within classified wellhead protection areas.

Refer to the following guidelines for siting legal snow dumps and protecting New Hampshire's water.

Recommended Guidelines for Snow Disposal

These guidelines will assist in identifying snow disposal sites that minimize impact to the environment. Please note that snow dumps are kept out of water bodies due to waste materials, such as litter and debris. Waste does not belong on the land surface either; after the snow melts, all waste must be collected and disposed of properly.

- Disposed snow should be stored near flowing surface waters, but at least 25 feet from the high water mark of the surface water and/or top of stream bank. If a site cannot be found near a flowing surface water, then upland sites further from surface waters are acceptable, provided they do not impact water supply sources as described below.
- A silt fence or equivalent barrier should be securely placed between the snow storage area and the high water mark and/or the top of stream bank with care taken not to exceed the barrier with over-piling. This area should also be accessible for post-melt cleanup. Note: silt fence must be installed prior to the ground freezing.

- The snow storage area should be at least 75 feet from any private water supply wells, at least 200 feet from any community water supply wells, and at least 400 feet from any municipal wells. (Note: Snow storage areas are prohibited in wellhead protection areas.)
- All debris in the snow storage area should be cleared from the site prior to snow storage.
- By May 15 of each year, all debris from active snow storage areas should be cleared and properly disposed of.

Snow Disposal Site Selection Procedures

Municipal public works officials should consider consulting with the local health officer and conservation commission to identify sites. Securing sites prior to the winter season will help to alleviate capacity problems during winters with heavy snowfall. NHDES is available to help municipal officials identify appropriate snow disposal sites. The following are guidelines for site selection:

- Estimate how much snow disposal capacity is needed for the season so that an adequate number of sites can be selected and prepared.
- Sites lacking mature tree growth are preferred; trees make collection of debris more difficult after the winter season.
- Identify sites that could potentially be used for snow disposal such as municipal open space, parks, recreation fields and parking areas. If no additional municipal sites are available, consider securing permission from landowners of non-municipally owned sites.

For more information about snow storage contact the NHDES Watershed Management Bureau at (603) 271-3398.