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Letter to the editor

Salt situation

In her March 10 "Political corner" article in Halifax Citizen, Coun. Linda Mosher incorrectly states that "salt doesn't work on sidewalks when temperatures dip below -9".

As a resident of her district, I wrote the following to Ms. Mosher prior to her address to city council on Feb. 24 about non-traditional approaches to ice removal: "The ultimate limiting temperature for the use of ordinary (sodium chloride) salt is -21 °C. (Below that temperature the brine freezes.) Salt is useful at -10 °C (and lower, down to -21 °C), despite recent reports, but it takes a little longer to work. On these sunny days the ice temperature can be near 0 °C even when the outdoor air temperature is -15 °C (as this morning) because the sun's rays are absorbed by the ice. Even if the air temperature is low, say -18 °C, and salt's action is slow, salt works as a grit which also provides traction, and then gives its freezing point effect as time passes or it warms a little."

As a scientist, I believe strongly in doing the experiment. Dalhousie University has had clean walkways all winter, helped by liberal use of salt. In contrast, the sidewalks on Oxford Street, which serve hundreds of pedestrians daily and have had very little salt, are still covered in several inches of ice.

Salt has its detractions: it is somewhat costly and messy and corrosive. But it is a proven method to remove ice, even at temperatures as low as -20 °C. And more liberal use of salt can make our roads and sidewalks safer.

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