**Seasonal Tips for Protecting Our Waterways in Winter**

By Emma Danz, Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy

Winter is certainly here, and with it comes road salts, piles of snow and uninvited house guests (the furry kind). These seasonal sights may impact water quality, and our goal is to keep winter wonderful by preventing pollution from reaching our waterways. Just like rain, snow-melt can carry pollutants into storm drains and streams. Think of all the black snow that accumulates along roadways; once it melts, that dirty water, full of petroleum products and other contaminants, finds its way to a stream, where it can harm wildlife and pollute our drinking water resources.

By making smart decisions while battling the cold, ice and snow this season, we can prevent additional stormwater pollution. For example, salt used to prevent ice on driveways, roads and sidewalks can easily wash into freshwater streams and destroy aquatic ecosystems. And we all know that pests like rodents and insects love to hide out in our homes for warmth over the winter, but using pesticides or insecticides can harm the watershed. If used outdoors or disposed of improperly, these chemicals can be washed into our streams by stormwater. In our waterways, these chemicals have the same effects on aquatic organisms that they do on the pests in our homes. These pesticides and excess salts also reduce the quality of the water we use for drinking and recreation.

Why not do your part this winter season to protect our streams from unnecessary stormwater pollution? Following these tips can help keep our water clean and protect the environment:

**Dispose of shoveled snow in vegetated areas; never dump it into streets or streams.** The more water can be absorbed by plants or sink into the ground, the less water will run off, carrying pollutants into streams. A rain garden or other planted area is the perfect place for shoveled snow.

**Use safe and effective alternatives to salt for ice, and follow the application rate on the label.** Safety is of utmost importance, but salt is damaging to plants, animals, concrete and water quality. Instead of focusing on melting the snow on your driveway or sidewalks, use sand to help gain traction. Or, use a salt-free de-icer like SafePaw. Remember, the sooner you shovel, the better, as less ice will form and less de-icer can be used. For more information, click here or type in http://goo.gl/B3MkAy.

**Use natural and non-toxic alternatives to chemical pesticides, and reduce indoor and outdoor chemical use.** Boric acid is a low-toxicity mineral that is highly effective over time, and bait boxes are another great alternative. There are also many herbal pest deterrents; for

example, mint detracts mice. For more information, visit the Natural Resources Defense Council at http://goo.gl/dvmB94.

**Salt piles should always be stored under a roof.** Report uncovered salt piles to the Department of Environmental Protection at 484-250-5900.

Have a safe and happy winter, and thank you for keeping the health of the watershed in mind. Your efforts can make a difference! If you have any questions or concerns about stormwater management this winter, the Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy is available as a resource. Visit our website at PerkiomenWatershed.org.

**Foamy pollution being discharged into the West Branch Skippack Creek as snow melts.**