

Antrim County: Season without salt

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ANTRIM COUNTY — For the remainder of the winter, one precious commodity will be in short supply: salt.

As early as Friday, Feb. 15, Antrim County Road Commission Engineer Manager Burt Thompson reported low levels of the ice melting agent to Elk Rapids Department of Public Works Superintendent Ron Ridge.

Ridge believes a series of mild winters led Antrim and other counties in the area to not stockpile enough salt in preparation for this winter.

But Thompson says the problems stem from the supply end. The salt comes from suppliers through state contracts, with each county placing an order at the beginning of the summer. Under the contracts, the suppliers must provide a percentage of the order salt.

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"The supplier has not produced enough salt to fulfill their contractual obligation," Thompson said.

So, Antrim County has been forced to stockpile their remaining salt, meaning they can no longer provide villages, such as Elk Rapids, with salt.

"We've still got some salt in the sheds," Thompson said. "But we cut back, anticipating bad weather in the future."

As February moves into March and temperatures become warmer, new weather threats can pose major problems, including freezing rain.

"Freezing rain is the worst thing you can get," Thompson said.

Normally, trucks use a three-to-one mixture

of calcium chloride and sand, Ridge said, but now they have begun to drench sand in a water and calcium chloride solution.

"Some people like it better," Ridge said. "It does provide for some melting."

Thompson also said the county uses several different mixtures, including a sand and brine mixture that provides more traction on slippery roads.

And Antrim isn't the only county affected by the supply shortages. It has affected all of northern Michigan, Thompson noted.

"It has been a widespread problem," he said. "The salt companies didn't fulfill their contracts."

As they are state contracts, Thompson said he wasn't sure what the

ramifications to the companies would be for not delivering enough salt.

But, with winter still in full effect, Ridge says the DPW will still be out plowing everyday and using the salt they do have in heavy traffic areas such as downtown.

"We'll put it down as we need to," he said.

In the meantime, Ridge recommends drivers take normal winter driving precautions, including driving slowly and giving vehicles around you plenty of distance.

"Drive for the conditions that are present," he said.

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