

Norfolk Insider

City of Norfolk, NE

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October 25, 2010

“Green Tips for Fall and Winter” by Jim Koch

Being green means being environmentally responsible and, according to Jim Koch, City of Norfolk storm water management director, fall and winter are important times to keep this in mind.

The main thing he wants residents to remember is that debris should not be swept into streets and storm water drains. “You may think leaves and grass clippings disappear when they’re swept out into the street but they end up in the storm water drains and then dump into our area rivers and streams. That yard debris then decomposes and uses oxygen meant for fish and other aquatic life,” Koch said.

Since fall is when most people apply fertilizer to their lawns, Koch recommends that phosphorous free fertilizers be used at the correct rate. “The chemicals and fertilizers applied to lawns eventually leach into our streets and waterways. Maintain a healthy lawn through aerating and proper fertilizing so less chemicals for lawn disease are needed,” Koch said.

A person can be “green” in the wintertime by using environmentally friendly products on their sidewalks and driveways. Some de-icers are significant source of phosphorous pollution. Phosphorous promotes overgrowth of weeds in lakes and ponds. Koch said that it’s good to use de-icers that contain 50 parts per million or less of phosphorous. He noted that pellets are usually more effective than flakes.

Instead of using rock salt (sodium chloride) on walkways, Koch said a better de-icer is calcium chloride. Although it is more expensive than rock salt, it is effective even at very low temperatures. It is also less corrosive and ecologically damaging than rock salt. Calcium magnesium acetate is also non-corrosive as it is made from corn or petroleum. It is also better for soils and plants.

Koch said potassium acetate is a good choice for small areas. Though more expensive than other products, it is easy to apply as a liquid and it is biodegradable. Liquid corn based de-icers have been used on highways and, though not as readily available for personal use, are effective and environmentally friendly alternatives.

Koch reminded residents to always use de-icing products according to manufacturer’s instructions. De-icers are meant to thaw out ice and snow on walkways making it easier to shovel it away.

Some people sprinkle sand, kitty litter or ashes on ice to provide traction for people or vehicles. Koch advised against using these products. “Traction agents will eventually work their way into the streets and then into the storm drains and our waterways. Many of the products people use may harm plant and animal life. Some people have used cracked corn as animals will eat it before spring but it may also attract rodents. Shoveling as soon as possible after a snowfall may be the best deterrent against icy walkways,” Koch said.

For more information on protecting our water resources this fall and winter, go to http://www.ci.norfolk.ne.us/Street/city_of_norfolk_stormwater_management.htm.