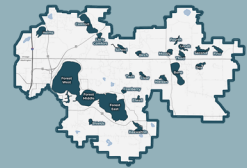




## MEMORANDUM

Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District

**Date:** August 3, 2023  
**To:** CLFLWD Board of Managers  
**From:** Mike Kinney, District Administrator  
**Subject:** Public Relations & Communications



**District Wide**

### Background/Discussion

This topic was discussed at the June 11<sup>th</sup> regular board meeting as part of the discussion surrounding the Comprehensive Education & Outreach Plan. The Board requested staff come back with additional information related to the differences between Education/Outreach and Public Relations; and how public relations may fit into future District initiatives.

Distinguishing “Education & Outreach” from “Public Relations”:

#### Terminology

Communications includes giving, receiving, and sharing information. The term “communication” encompasses all of the following terms:

- Information is content that can be accessed when needed. The learner doesn’t engage with the content beyond reading, which is relatively passive.
- Education focuses on encouraging individuals to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to enact positive behavior change. Educational efforts should be audience focused (similar to public relations). While information can be educational, the difference between information and education is the level of engagement. Education increases engagement.
- Public Relation is the practice of managing and disseminating information from an organization to the public in order to influence their perception but not necessarily their behavior. Public relations work anticipates, analyzes, and interprets public opinion, attitudes, and issues that may impact (for good or bad) the operations and plans of the organization.
- Social Marketing is an approach used to develop activities aimed at changing or maintaining people’s behavior for the benefit of individuals and society as a whole. The goal of social marketing is to change or maintain how people behave – not what they think or how aware they are about an issue.



## MEMORANDUM

Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District

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All of the District's education and outreach activities incorporate significant elements of public relations and social marketing and are intended to influence public perception and behavior in a positive way.

There is a great deal of cross-over in these terms and activities. The right strategy would be decided based on audience, objective, needs, and resources. Some of these activities can be successfully implemented in-house, some will be implemented with the shared resources and expertise of partners (including Watershed Partners, Blue Thumb, or EMWREP), and others may require the Board authorize hiring a company that specializes in social marketing and/or public relations.

### Current Efforts

The District's current efforts under the Comprehensive Education & Outreach Plan address media relations, social media, audience-focused engagement and outreach, promotion of District activities and programs, crisis management, and information including standard signage.

As stated in the Watershed Management Plan and the Comprehensive Education & Outreach Plan, the District's education, communication, and outreach efforts intersect with all other areas by providing strategy, consistency, branding, support, and implementation in promotion of District projects, programs, and priority activities. The education and outreach program staff work closely with all other District staff to support and meet all District's goals in addition to the work that is specific to the education and outreach program.

### Potential Future Initiatives

Staff informally met with Mary Pat McNeil of MP+G Marketing Solutions, the developers of the "[Low Salt. No Salt. Minnesota](#)" and "Daily Dose of Trees" campaigns, to get a better understanding of how public relations and marketing could best serve the District. The biggest takeaway from this meeting was the recommendation that, after planning, there be a focus on a public relations & marketing campaign around a specific initiative rather than the District in general. The general public typically doesn't respond well to entities (particularly government groups) promoting themselves without other purpose. Promoting a specific initiative has the greatest potential for success and can help build relationships with the public that will garner support for other District activities.

A strategic communications plan (which would include both PR and marketing communications) would be research-driven, establish direction and goals, and be built on strategy (instead of starting with tactics). It will inform work plans and budgets and enable CLFLWD to demonstrate and measure successes.



## MEMORANDUM

Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District

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Should the Board wish to pursue a communications plan with a public relations and marketing campaign, it is the recommendation of staff that the campaign focus on the new comprehensive shoreline program. By creating a public relations and marketing campaign around the comprehensive shoreline program, the District has the potential to:

- Increase public knowledge of the program and the watershed district
- Generate positive discussions on the topic of shoreline protection
- Highlight the benefits of natural shorelines and buffers
- Generate interest in the financial incentives and technical assistance offered by the District.
- Become a statewide leader in the push for natural shorelines and shoreline restorations
- Garner positive public opinion that can be carried over to other programs and projects
- Develop general best practices for use in everyday education & outreach work

If this recommendation is agreeable to the Board, staff will work with MG+P Marketing Solutions to develop a proposal and scope of work for a communications plan with a public relations and marketing campaign around the comprehensive shoreline program to be brought back to the board for review and approval at a future meeting. Alternatively, the Board may wish to direct staff to develop a Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit multiple proposals from different firms.

### Attached

- MG+P Case Study: Minnesota Department of Health
- MG+P Case Study: Hennepin County Chloride Initiative

# Low Salt, No Salt Minnesota

Offers a Toolbox for Local Property Managers to Reduce or Eliminate the Use of Deicers



Salt is a **permanent**, invisible pollutant and it is being overused.



## THE UNDERSTORY:

### Salt pollution is a growing problem

The leading source of chloride pollution is from deicing chemicals (salts) used for winter maintenance. Chloride damages property and the environment, harms aquatic species, and impacts drinking water quality.

Chlorides from winter maintenance operations are a global as well as a local problem. Overuse of deicers for winter maintenance is a growing problem in Minnesota lakes, ponds, wetlands, streams, and groundwater. About 50 waterbodies in Minnesota already have dangerous chloride levels, and another 75 waterbodies are close to the danger zone.

### Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)

*“University of Minnesota research shows that 3/4 of deicers stay where they are applied, permanently impairing waters for aquatic life and human consumption. They also adversely change soil structure and prematurely age infrastructure.”*

Unfortunately, alternatives to chloride have other tradeoffs in cost, environmental impacts, and service.

The only option for managing chloride pollution is to apply it only when, where, and in the amount needed.

## THE INITIATIVE:

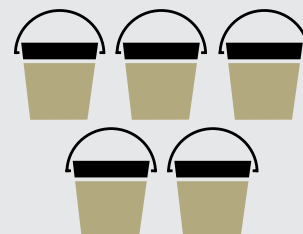
### A collaboration between watershed districts and cities in Hennepin County

The Hennepin County Chloride Initiative (HCCI) is a collaboration between multiple watershed districts, watershed organizations, nonprofits, and cities in Hennepin County with support from the county and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

MP+G Marketing Solutions worked closely with HCCI to develop **Low Salt, No Salt Minnesota**, a research-driven program designed to help communities maintain winter safety while reducing chloride-based deicer use and its harmful impact to the environment.

The program was created and tested by professionals from cities and watershed organizations in Hennepin County for implementation by Local Government Units (LGUs) in their communities. It builds on relationships and ongoing opportunities to provide continued program support.

it takes only  
**1 teaspoon of road salt**  
to permanently pollute  
5 gallons of water.



Once chloride is in a waterbody, there is no feasible way to remove it.

## THE CHALLENGE:

### How to get people to reduce their use of deicing salts?

HCCI knew many people believe protecting water resources is important. As scientists, they also knew that education can foster positive attitudes about reducing salt use. But they were concerned that education about chloride pollution, by itself, may not be enough to get people to change their winter salting routines.

MP+G's detailed research provided insight into target audience beliefs, habits, and practices and refined HCCI's initial assumptions:

The ability to maintain **safety** while realizing financial **savings** and improving **sustainability** are key messages conveyed through this program.

Our research acknowledged that people are often unsure of how best to reduce chloride use on their properties or how to address concerns about safety or liability. The campaign was built to step into this void by offering a friendly face and simple, site-specific advice.

But HCCI also knew that being the local expert on chloride pollution through the lens of water resources management didn't mean local government agencies have to have all the answers. Instead, cultivating a positive relationship, providing support and encouragement, humbly observing the property manager's challenges with winter maintenance, and pointing people to the right resources would be essential to the success of the **Low Salt, No Salt Minnesota** program.

*"The research shows that the biggest driver of over-salting is client demand due to fear of slip and fall lawsuits.*

*Often, the person applying the salt knows more isn't better, but they are reacting to their customer's demand."*

## THE SOLUTION:

### A toolbox for property managers and their teams

## KEY MESSAGE

***"When performing winter maintenance, you can maintain safety while realizing financial savings and improving sustainability."***

MP+G helped HCCI develop a marketing toolbox to engage communities on the proper use of winter deicers. While these materials are useful for a variety of audiences, the targeted audiences for this program include faith-based communities, property managers, and homeowners/townhome associations.

The solution is based on the premise that personal relationships and site-specific advice is an effective way to change behavior related to winter salt use. With this approach in mind, the primary goal of the initiative was to provide a toolbox that LGUs may use during conversations with residents, businesses, and property managers about best practices related to winter maintenance.

MP+G Marketing Solutions worked collaboratively, through the Hennepin County Chloride Initiative (HCCI), with water resource professionals who provided the scientific background and practical expertise behind the campaign. MP+G conducted target-audience interviews to inform a comprehensive market research report. This detailed report provided insight into target audience beliefs, habits, and practices and helped us develop key messaging that resonated with our audiences. The research further informed the development of a branding platform, a name for the initiative, campaign strategy, brand identity, and tagline. Other elements of the campaign included a recruitment letter, marketing toolbox, and a high-end, branded ice chipper for program participants.

Included in the marketing toolbox are a customizable PowerPoint presentation, explainer video, a legal guidance video, social media clip, brand assets, and informational materials. The toolbox is available on an internal website for local government units.

## THE TARGET AUDIENCES:

### Why focus on homeowners' associations, property managers and faith-based organizations?

On large developed properties, winter maintenance is typically performed by contractors. When developing an approach for **Low Salt, No Salt Minnesota**, HCCI wanted to understand if contractors would be a good audience for focusing outreach efforts.







What MP+G helped HCCI find through our interviews was that private salt applicators were generally knowledgeable about chloride as a water contaminant. However, their salting practices were primarily driven by client demand and liability concerns. These clients are usually owners and managers of large properties; the program focuses on reducing their demand for salt.

## THE RESOUNDING RESULTS:

### Low Salt, No Salt Minnesota is being well-received.

- Our clients hosted five pilot presentations to townhome, condo, and faith-based groups both in-person and online.
- Additionally, other organizations including Capitol Region Watershed District, Nine Mile Creek Watershed, and the City of Plymouth either have hosted sessions or have sent letters out to target audiences.
- HCCI hosted a Train-the-Trainer workshop with over two dozen staff from cities and watersheds attending and received great feedback.
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is pleased with the campaign and is planning to implement it across the state.

- A mapping tool is being developed to track presentations which will help the team develop a more geographically complete community of practice.
- Train-the-Trainer video is in the works to aid presenters without attending an in-person training.
- The HCCI team is slated to present the campaign at the Water Resources Conference in St. Paul along with a similar presentation and training at the Minnesota Watersheds conference.
- Plans are in the works with MPCA for training Green Corps members to help deliver the program in various cities.
- As well as working with Freshwater (founder of the Minnesota Water Stewards) to utilize Stewards for pilot presentations and to help gather properties to receive the formal presentation.
- Additionally, Hennepin County created a new position to help watersheds and cities with water education. This position will be responsible for giving the **Low Salt, No Salt Minnesota** presentation several times a year.



Full video - [Click to View](#)



Social Media - [Click to View](#)



Legal Guidance Video - [Click to View](#)



**For more information visit the website**  
[rpbcd.org/low-salt-no-salt](http://rpbcd.org/low-salt-no-salt)

“MP+G’s approach, which included market research to identify key messages and materials tailored to those messages, was truly impressive and sets them apart. MP+G demonstrated a deep understanding of our target audience, and their market research provided valuable insights that informed the development of the campaign. From the eye-catching logo and branding to the engaging videos and informative printed materials, every aspect of the campaign was carefully crafted to resonate with our target audience.”

**Jessica Vanderwerff Wilson**, CFM | Water Resources Manager  
CITY OF EDINA | HENNEPIN COUNTY CHLORIDE INITIATIVE

“MP+G successfully led our newly formed group representing multiple organizations with a common goal through the process of developing an effective new program from the ground up.”

**Sue Nissen** | Minnesota Water Steward  
HENNEPIN COUNTY CHLORIDE INITIATIVE

“I truly appreciated MP+G’s flexibility and the ‘above and beyond’ issues they tackled or took extra time to get just right. They handled our feedback with patience and poise, but also held firm when we needed to meet timelines. It was wonderful to get outside perspectives and their truly professional touch to a brand-new campaign name, logo, tagline, and materials! All in all, it was a fabulous project with outstanding products and I will recommend MP+G to others.”

**Laura Jester** | Commission Administrator  
BASSETT CREEK WATERSHED MANAGEMENT |  
HENNEPIN COUNTY CHLORIDE INITIATIVE

## About the Marketing Solutions Team



MP+G is passionate about protecting and preserving the environment. Our goal was to help HCCI drive positive change in the winter maintenance habits of Minnesotans.



MP+G partnered with Danie Watson, The Watson Group, for her research and communications expertise to build this resilient brand and dynamic educational marketing campaign for the Hennepin County Chloride Initiative.

# Minnesota Department of Health

Helping Minnesotans who have concerns about environmental toxins and cancer



The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) actively works to protect Minnesotans' health and prevent serious diseases like cancer. MDH works behind the scenes with families, neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces to create conditions that support the health of all Minnesotans, no matter where they live.

## The Environmental Health Division (EHD) of MDH focuses on the many conditions in the environment that affect health.

The “environment” includes the areas where we live, learn, work, worship, and play. It’s made up of the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, and other conditions we may not control, but which can affect our health. While most significant risks of developing cancer come from lifestyle factors, such as smoking, exposures to certain chemicals in the environment may contribute to an individual’s risk of developing cancer in some cases. Also, sources of significant pollution, such as industrial manufacturing and heavy vehicle traffic, are often located closer to lower income communities and communities of color, increasing the risk of exposure to pollutants which may cause cancers.

EHD staff members are frequently contacted by people seeking more information about cancer and environmental exposures. This includes people living near contaminated sites, parents of children with cancer, and people who are concerned about cancer clusters. At the same time, cancer occurrences are more common than many people realize, and some who contact EHD need information about cancer and the environment to better understand common and potential risk factors.

## A PROCESS GROUNDED IN COLLABORATION, CONSENSUS, AND EQUITY

Clients at EHD asked Danie Watson and The Watson Group to help them improve their outreach and effectiveness by listening intentionally to members of disproportionately affected communities, and tailoring messaging and communications to be responsive to community needs, as well as providing accurate information to all Minnesotans about cancer risk.

**In Phase 1**, The Watson Group, working collaboratively with EHD, completed qualitative communications research—focus groups and key informant interviews with people who had contacted MDH, and with subject matter experts. The resulting data were analyzed to better understand the communications needs of target audiences.

*“What should we do if we’re concerned? Is there someone at MDH we can contact to walk us through the process? I need an [action plan]. When MDH or MPCA finds a hot spot, what do you do about it? Are resources provided? Are residents notified?”*

– Interview participant





## KEY FINDINGS LED TO CLEAR MESSAGING GUIDANCE:

- Participants said that when responding to inquiries, **MDH should respond with compassionate concern, understanding, reassurance, and explicit recognition of factors creating historical trauma in marginalized communities.**
- **Respectful, reciprocal, and collaborative communications are desired; some participants are seeking a dialogue with, and response** from MDH.
- Knowledge levels about possible exposures to hazardous substances in the environment and concerns about links between toxic chemicals and cancer varied; more education is needed.
- MDH EHD will benefit from working through its community-led partner organizations to **develop culturally informed materials, and to engage these partners in outreach.**
- **Plain-language versions** of information should accompany scientific explanations.

“People are looking for a science-based approach explained in plain language that’s not condescending... Conversations with MDH were like talking with someone you know—friendly, professional.” – **Interview participant**

## RESEARCH-DRIVEN COMMUNICATIONS LEAD WITH COMPASSION

In **Phase 2**, Danie Watson partnered with Mary Pat McNeil of MP+G Marketing Solutions to develop a video and eight information sheets about cancer and the environment—grounded in the research—and to test these communications with members of the target audiences. Danie and Mary Pat also provided recommendations and content, navigation, and graphic changes for the EDH website.

We tested the animated video with our focus groups, finalizing the script and visuals based on their feedback. From their responses, we know the video provides an empathetic and informational overview of cancer and the environment in an easy-to-comprehend, factual, and compassionate manner. While sharing sometimes daunting statistics along with known cancer-causing risk factors, we’ve been told the video also provides hope by sharing healthy ways to improve one’s risks along with links to resources for more information. The video will be embedded in Environmental Health Division’s home page and used by educators during outreach presentations to the public. It may also appear in social media posts.

With the addition of the video and incorporating its accompanying people-friendly graphics throughout, the new Environmental Health Division website is now a warmer, more welcoming, and easier-to-navigate site within the Minnesota Department of Health website. The detailed, peer-reviewed information sheets are available to the public as downloadable PDFs and will also serve as handouts for in-person meetings, focus groups, and presentations. We welcome you to visit the newly updated site and take a look for yourself:

[www.health.state.mn.us/cancerandenvironment](http://www.health.state.mn.us/cancerandenvironment)



Watson Group Marketing specializes in communications for government and nonprofit organizations. We share a commitment to health, education, sustainability, and equity.



Watson Group Marketing worked with MP+G Marketing Solutions, a partner chosen for their strong branding, strategy, and creative services.