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City of Lowell, Mass., reports 30% reduction in road salt use over the past two winters

Fourth-largest city in Massachusetts attributes historical salt savings to Cirus SpreadSmart Rx spreader controls installed on its snowplow trucks — and anticipates more savings this winter

MINNEAPOLIS – January 6, 2015 – The [City of Lowell](#), Mass., recently reported to community members that the city’s Public Works department decreased its winter road salt use by 30 percent and saved over \$780,000 on its snow and ice budget. The city attributed the savings to its installation of [SpreadSmart Rx](#) spreader control systems on its snowplow trucks. Based on a truck’s speed plus air and road surface temperatures, the electronic spreader control system — rather than snowplow truck operators — regulates the rate of salt or other deicing prescriptions applied to winter road surfaces. SpreadSmart Rx spreader control systems are designed and manufactured by [Cirus Controls](#) of Minneapolis, Minn.

Before installing electronic spreader controls on its snowplow trucks, the Lowell Department of Public Works, or DPW, was applying tons of salt on city streets for each winter storm. “Our operators would typically set their existing manual spreaders to maximum and go, putting down about 1,000 pounds of salt per lane mile. As a result, our streets were often covered in salt after a storm,” said Kevin Murphy, Lowell city manager. The leftover salt also raised aesthetic and environmental concerns.

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Page 2

Over the last three fiscal years, Lowell and DPW cut road salt use by 30 percent when measured in tons per inch of snow. The drop is significant for three reasons. The seasonal amount of snowfall tripled during this time. The average temperature dropped by 9 degrees over this period. And there were more ice-related events in the Great Winter of 2013-2014 than the two previous snow seasons that required salt spreading — salt use not factored into the tons of salt used per inch of snow statistic.

Over the last two fiscal years, Lowell saved over \$780,000 on its snow and ice budget. In FY 2013, the city saved \$463,556. In FY 2014, the city saved another \$322,892. “Over the next few years, more savings are expected as additional trucks are upfitted with Cirus salt spreader controls,” said Ralph Snow, Lowell department of public works commissioner. Lowell has also been saving more money by cleaning up less salt after each winter storm or ice event.

“Our number one objective is to provide customers better tools for cutting salt use and saving money,” said Paul Mortell, president of Cirus Controls. “And by working closely with the Lowell Department of Public Works to develop a snow and ice control package specific to Lowell’s needs and concerns, we were able to achieve that goal.”

To date, Lowell has installed SpreadSmart Rx spreader controls on 24 new and older snowplow trucks. “The cost for equipping each truck was about \$8,300 for a total investment of around \$200,000,” said Snow.

The investment in salt spreader controls from Cirus Controls has helped Lowell both environmentally and financially. “We’ve significantly reduced the amount of salt runoff into our rivers, streams and homeowners’ yards,” said Murphy. “In addition, the salt savings over the last two snow seasons has reduced our snow and ice liability. The smaller liability has negated our need to dip into any other budget surpluses or incorporating a greater snow and ice deficit into the following year’s budget, which would add to our citizens’ tax burden.”

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As the winter of 2014-2015 settles in, Lowell and DPW look forward to continuing the trend of cutting salt use and saving money — and helping its snow and ice budget last through another unpredictable New England winter.

About Cirus Controls

Cirus Controls designs, engineers and manufactures central hydraulic systems, electronic spreader controls, advanced plow controls and innovative telematics-based data management systems for winter road maintenance vehicles. The company’s award-winning winter road maintenance system provides fleet and operations managers and commercial operators with improved tools for making snow and ice control operations more cost-effective and environmentally friendly. For more information, contact Cirus Controls at 763.493.9380 or info@ciruscontrols.com. Learn more at www.ciruscontrols.com.

Graphs

Salt Usage

	TONS OF SALT	INCHES OF SNOW	TONS PER INCH
FY12	6,571.3	23.9	274.9
FY13	10,713.1	72.1	148.6
FY14	14,165.1	74.6	189.9

Data courtesy of the City of Lowell, Mass.

Tons of salt used by the Lowell Department of Public Works per inch of snow. Data courtesy of the City of Lowell, Mass.

Average Temperatures

	November	December	January	February	March	Average
FY12	43.8	34.8	28.7	32.6	43.5	36.7
FY13	38.8	33.3	26.3	27.8	34.4	32.1
FY14	38.1	26.8	21.6	23	27.8	27.5

Data courtesy of the City of Lowell, Mass., and weather-warehouse.com.

Temperatures in Lowell, Mass., during the last three snow seasons. Data courtesy of the City of Lowell, Mass., and weather-warehouse.com.

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Page 4

Photos



The Lowell, Mass., Department of Public Works and its snowplow operators have their work cut out each time winter returns to northern Massachusetts.



Lowell, Mass., has equipped both new and older snowplow trucks with SpreadSmart Rx spreader control systems from Cirus Controls.

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SpreadSmart Rx spreader control systems offer numerous mounting options including a dashboard display.

Materials Dispersed

Type	Miles	Time	Amount	Avg. Rate
Granular: Salt	143	7:10:00	31,460 lbs.	220 lbs. / mile
Prewet: Brine	143	7:10:00	126 gal	8 gal / ton
Anti-ice: KC12	17	0:50:00	510 gal	30 gal / mile

Types of detailed information available in Cirus Controls' companion spreading performance reports include materials dispensed. The Lowell, Mass., Department of Public Works is using these performance reports to provide more accurate and detailed data to city supervisors.



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