**Road-Safety experts fear ‘whole new world of driving in Ottawa’.**

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***The Ottawa Citizen, August 12, 2000*.**Accidents could soar and taxpayers in the new City of Ottawa could face millions of dollars in replacement costs if the federal government bans road salt, as a new report suggests. Canadians have 60 days to comment on the study before the federal government makes a final decision in December. If approved, the federal government has 42 months to develop and implement regulations.

“Obviously we will probably have lots of accidents and loss of life,” said Willy Dunn, Ottawa’s road maintenance manager. “It will be a whole new world of driving in Ottawa. We will be back to studs on your tires and chains. Everything will have to be four-wheel drive vehicles.”

“Effective winter maintenance has been shown to reduce motor vehicle crashes over a winter season by 20%. Within four hours of applying road salt, injury crashes caused by winter storms are cut by 88 percent,” said Emile Therien, president of the Canada Safety Council. Labeling road salt as “toxic” could prevent their use to ensure safe driving conditions.” Mr. Therien said that while environmental protection is a noble cause, “the protection of plants and animals must be balanced with the project of human life.”

A five-year federal government study released yesterday says road salt is a toxic substance that endangers plants and animals and should be regulated. The Environment Canada study says road salts are entering the environment in large amounts, posing a risk to plants, animals, bird fish, lake and stream ecosystems and groundwater.

Salt has also plagued homeowners hooked up to wells. Four years ago, the provincial government admitted that accumulated road salt was at fault for contaminating wells serving at least 250 homes in Long Beach, a community near Brockville, Ont. Residents reported that the water from their wells was so salty it left a film on washed cars and pets refused to drink tap water. Pipes, faucets and appliances corroded and plants withered.

In a typical year, five-million tonnes of assorted road salts are used in Canada, the report says.

Municipal officials say the problem with a possible ban or regulation of road salt is not the lack of alternatives. There are several of them, but the real problem is that they are very expensive and it is unclear how taxpayers will react to the proposal of a massive replacement bill.

“Everything we know today, as things stand today, the alternatives are much more expensive and the range is up to $2,000 a tonne,” Mr. Beveridge, Ottawa-Carlton’s director of road maintenance, said. He points out that right now, area municipalities pay $65 a tonne for road salt. But the cost of the alternatives, which are mainly the family of acetates and formats, ranges from $250 a tonne to $2000.

“If there was a miracle material, we probably would have found it,” Mr. Dunn said. He said that Ottawa’s unique wintry weather prevents us from using other less expensive materials, such as sand and gravel. With 222 cm of snow a season, Ottawa tops all Canadian cities. Coupled with the fact that our winters are damp, sand and gravel is just not as effective as salt. Cities with dry and less snow, such as Edmonton, do well with sand and gravel, Mr. Dunn said. “Abrasives like sand or crushed stone are not effective. They get compressed into the ice and you end up with huge ice packs on the roads.” Mr. Beveridge agreed.