

Salinity of northeast U.S. water increases

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Scientists say northeastern U.S. surface water might become toxic for freshwater marine life and unfit for human consumption within 100 years.

The researchers determined fresh water across the northeastern United States, from Maryland to New Hampshire, is becoming more saline due to roadway construction.

Consequently, aquatic systems receive increased salt runoff, particularly from deicers used during the winter, Sujay Kaushal and colleagues at the University of Maryland's Center for Environmental Science in Frostburg, Md., reported.

They investigated the rate of salinization in three northeastern locations -- Baltimore County, Md.; the Hudson River Valley in New York State; and the White Mountains of New Hampshire.

In all three areas, baseline chloride concentrations increased during the past 30 years.

The scientists report some rural streams exceeded 100 milligrams per liter on a seasonal basis, while urban and suburban streams already exceed the recommended chloride limit of 250 milligrams per liter.

During the winter, the spike in deicer usage appeared to push peak levels in some urban waterways to 25 percent of the chloride concentration of seawater.

The study appears in this week's issue of the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

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