

Potassium Chloride VS Sodium Chloride

The Secrets of Coexisting in a Competitive World



In water softener salts—as in life—there’s no accounting for taste. Some people prefer sodium chloride, while others prefer potassium chloride. Even though these two products compete for sales in the softening salt market, the fact is there’s plenty of room for both to thrive. This fact has implications for your operation, because if you’re not carrying both products, then you’re missing an opportunity to increase profits and attract more customers. Let’s look at some of the differences between these products, why customers make the choices they do and how you can leverage this knowledge to improve profitability in the category.

Sodium chloride is a naturally occurring mineral found in the earth and comes from underground salt mines or solar evaporation ponds. It’s the most commonly used salt in water softener brine tanks. When the brine solution containing sodium chloride washes over the resin, the hard mineral ions in the water are replaced with sodium. Sodium chloride brands are commonly

available in a variety of forms including blocks, crystals, pellets and cubes. Beside the fact that it’s widely available, sodium chloride often is the customer’s preferred softener salt because of the comparatively lower price.

Potassium chloride also is a naturally occurring mineral and is used primarily in agriculture. It works in softeners the same way sodium chloride does but replaces the hard water minerals with potassium instead of sodium. Potassium chloride is an essential nutrient for human health and plays an important role in the functioning of organs, nerves and muscles. It can be found in a wide variety of foods such as dairy products, meat, fruits and vegetables. In addition, potassium chloride is important to the healthy growth of plant life. Because extracting potassium chloride from the earth is more costly than mining sodium chloride, potassium chloride is more expensive.

Generally, customers tend to perceive that all water softener salts are the same and, therefore, they spend very little time thinking about which variety to buy. But as we have just seen, there are some significant differences between sodium chloride and potassium chloride, and you can use this information to help your customers choose the right salt for their lifestyles.

For price-sensitive customers and for customers with no sodium-related health concerns, sodium chloride is an excellent choice. It’s effective, inexpensive, easily obtained and usable in any water softener.

On the other hand, potassium chloride would be a better choice for other kinds of customers. For example, customers on sodium-restricted diets and customers who are concerned about their overall sodium intake might be more comfortable choosing a potassium chloride brand. Potassium chloride also may be the softener salt of choice among customers who are especially health conscious or concerned about the environment. This brings me to another important point: the value of actively educating your customers on the differences between sodium chloride and potassium chloride. For instance, it’s a certainty that few if any of your customers are aware of the role potassium chloride plays in maintaining good health or that potassium chloride contributes

to plant vigor and soil stability.

By pointing out these facts to your customers, you may be able to up-sell a sodium chloride customer to a potassium chloride brand. Don’t underestimate your power to influence a customer’s choice of softener salt. More often than not, a customer will buy the product recommended by the salesman.

When assisting customers, be sure to ask them lifestyle questions that will help you guide their softener salt selection.

- Are you health conscious?
- Do you watch the amount of sodium in your diet?
- Are you aware of the health benefits of potassium chloride?
- Do you know the environmental benefits of potassium chloride?

Finally, knowing some of the demographic variables that align with certain softener salt preferences can help you steer customers toward the right product. For example, elderly people and women often are especially interested in the health benefits of using potassium chloride. Remember, both sodium chloride and potassium chloride softener salts have a role to play in your operation. Your input can carry a lot of weight in the customer’s product choices. By sharing your product knowledge with customers you can maximize the sales potential of both kinds of products.

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About the Author

This article was written by Don Oster, product manager, A & I of IMC Salt, which manufactures K-Life potassium chloride and Pro Soft White Diamond sodium chloride water softener salt.

For more information on this subject, write in 1013 on the reader service card.

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