



What's really the bigger nutrient pollution problem – slow-release fertilizer on the golf green or tons of leaves going down the drain into the lake?

Fertilizer Use Under Scrutiny by Cities, Counties

The broad-based risks from contaminated fast-release fertilizer, including harm to intergenerational health and welfare, make it imperative that the law does not leave control of hazardous substances in fertilizer to discretionary or voluntary industry measures.

- Crystal River City Resolution

By Betsy McGill

While water-quantity continues to be a major issue for most areas, several municipalities and counties are targeting fertilizer use on lawns and commercial landscapes as a means of addressing water quality. The cities of Jacksonville, Naples and Crystal River as well as Sarasota County have considered regulating the type and quantity of fertilizer that can be used and/or the timing of applications, citing the need to reduce nitrogen and other nutrients being introduced into water bodies.

One of the difficulties in singling out a product to “ban” or to “endorse,” however, is that terms to describe products such as “fast release,” “slow release,” “water soluble” or “organic,”

can be confusing without a thorough understanding of how a term applies to that product and the way it works. Also of concern is the lack of hard data confirming how much nutrient runoff is actually originating from landscape fertilization. At a recent Green Industries Forum in Palmetto, a representative of the Manatee Bay Estuary Program said that 62 percent of the nitrogen being introduced into the bay is the result of stormwater runoff; of that 62 percent, attendees were told that 20 percent originates from residential lawns. These numbers, though, are based on modeling – taking representative samples, then using that data times the total area of lawns to arrive at a figure. At this time, there is no data on how many lawns are being maintained by lawn care services versus homeowners, how many are being fertilized or how often (and some studies indicate that many lawns are not fertilized at all).

Sarasota County has hired a consultant to assemble a working group of stakeholders to look more closely at this issue over the next 12 months. I’ll be participating, as will others within the

Florida Sod Growers Cooperative. As always, our industry’s position is that we support reasonable and enforceable actions based on good science. We also support the use of scientifically based Best Management Practices rather than county-by-county regulation. Please keep me posted if you hear of regulations of this type in your area and stay tuned for more information.

EDITORS NOTE: This note in the most recent Florida Sod Growers Cooperative is reprinted here to show that our affiliations with Allied Associations are working as we work together and share information on common issues. The Crystal River resolution at the opening speaks for itself as it shows the monumental lack of understanding by local officials of what and how fertilizer works. That misunderstanding continues with the use of terms like “organic” and “soluble.” These people don’t seem to get that all nutrients must be soluble for the plants/turf to use them. Hopefully the task group will be able to bring some practical common sense and actual facts to light during their deliberations in Sarasota.