

Florida Consumer Fertilizer Task Force

# Let the Science Begin

By Joel Jackson

The Florida Consumer Fertilizer Task Force was created by the 2007 Florida Legislature to address several issues beginning with phosphorus loading in Lake Okeechobee and eventually expanding to include nitrogen and all watersheds and basins in the state.

The clean-up of Lake Okeechobee began with addressing agricultural uses of fertilizers but quickly spread to addressing urban uses of fertilizer including residential and commercial lawns, sports fields and golf courses. The rule deals primarily with the amount of phosphorus (P) and nitrogen (N) that can be formulated and put into containers of fertilizer products weighing less than 49 pounds, also known as specialty products. The law does not regulate improper application of the products.

However, limitations have been placed on the amount of total P and N that can be applied per application and per year. Intensely managed sports and golf turf can use tissue- and soil-testing results to justify additional nutrient applications if needed. The golf industry is guided by the nutrient management recommendations contained in the newly published Golf Course BMP Manual.

Copies of the BMP manuals were sent to every golf course in the state. If you did not receive one contact the FGCSA at

407-248-1971 or FLGRN@aol.com.

As of Sept. 30, at least two local ordinances (Sanibel Island and Sarasota County) have cited the Golf BMP Manual recommendations as the guidelines that golf courses in their jurisdictions must follow regarding nutrient management. Both ordinances also ban the application of N and P during the “rainy season” which they each define with different dates. The state hopes that by drafting a standardized statewide rule based on science that local governments will use that rule to educate and guide homeowner use to help minimize any negative effects of residential fertilizer use.

**MISSION STATEMENT**

“The Florida Consumer Fertilizer Task Force, representing diverse stakeholder interests from around the state, will provide recommendations to the Florida Legislature to improve efficiency, effectiveness and consistency in Florida’s regulation and use of consumer fertilizers. The Task Force’s task will be to review, discuss and seek consensus (10 of 13 votes is agreed as consensus) on a package of recommendations to the Legislature for proposed refinements to Florida’s regulation and use of consumer fertilizers to ensure they are based on the very best available science and uniform(ly) subject to variations necessary to meet mandated state and

**Task Force Members and Representation**

Mayor Jay Arend, Florida League of Cities, Inc.

Sen. David Aronberg, Florida Senate  
Peter John Barile, Environmental Community

Jerry Brooks, Department of Environmental Protection

Richard Budell, DACS Office of Agricultural Water Policy

Casey Fitzgerald (Vice-chair), Water Management Districts

Richard Martinez, National Fertilizer Industry

Representative Bryan Nelson, Florida House of Representatives

Ron Olson, Florida-Based Fertilizer Industry

Andy Rackley (Chair), Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Jerry Sartain, UF Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences

Karen Taylor, Registered Landscape architect

Commissioner Jon Thaxton, Florida Association of Counties

**Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDOACS) Florida Consumer Fertilizer Task Force Project Development and Delivery Schedule**

Nov. 2, 2007: Task Force Meeting 3 - West Palm Beach

Nov. 14, 2007: Task Force Meeting 4: Draft Recommendations Approval Public Workshops—Round One (Following Task Force Meeting) Tallahassee

Dec. 17, 2007: Task Force Meeting 5—Review of Public Comments Public Workshops—Round Two (Following Task Force Meeting) Apopka

Jan. 11, 2008: Task Force Meeting 6—Adoption of Final Package of Recommendations - Tallahassee

Jan. 15, 2008: Delivery of Final Recommendations to DACS and Florida Legislature

federal water quality standards.”

Here is the remaining meeting schedule for the Task Force. It would be a good idea for representatives of all green industries to attend one of these public meetings in their areas so they can monitor the progress and make appropriate comments.

**EDITOR’S NOTE:** *I attended the first meeting in Sarasota and it was primarily to set up the process and ground rules for conducting the business of the Task Force. They elected Andy Rackley of FDOACS as chairman of the group and Casey Fitzgerald from the water management districts as vice chairman. While all members cited using best available science, several members of the group also were involved in local ordinances which ban the use of nitrogen and phosphorus during warm-season turf-growing (rainy) season. That ban is not based on science. It is based on intuition that if fertilizer is applied and it rains it automatically must run off. That’s why we need to stay involved.*