

Shades Of Green

■ OPINION

Did you ever confront a ridiculous situation in your community where someone is getting away with something bogus or unethical, and all you can do is utter the old adage, "There oughta be a law against that?"

Sometimes we beg for common-sense laws to protect the innocent and control the predators in our society. But our public servants occasionally enact laws without really understanding the issue they wish to solve with legislation.

I'm thinking of places like San Francisco, Seattle and New York, among others, that have banned or are considering banning the use of pesticides in their jurisdictions. And recently California and other states have openly discussed banning pesticide use in schools. Many are now rethinking the folly of their hasty action, having realized that weeds, disease-carrying insects and vermin can spiral out of control.

Not a clue

Recently, in Florida's St. John's County and Citrus County, local officials have begun regulating fertilizer applications. Under the good intention of keeping control of nitrate levels in watersheds, springs and rivers, these folks are instituting local ordinance or development rules that dictate the type, timing and quantity of fertilizer that people can use in the affected areas. Of course, they don't have a real clue of what's going on with nutrients and the turf, but it sure sounds like a real good idea to protect the environment.

I will say that in the case of St. John's County, the two golf courses that were affected did have input into the ordinance, and were granted certain exceptions with which they felt they could live. Unfortunately, lawn care companies and homeowners were left with the short end of the stick. There just aren't too many 100-percent, slow-release fertilizers down at the Home Depot or Wal-Mart garden shop to use from May to October.

Also, there was a provision providing search-and-seizure powers that smacked of Big Brotherism. It was replete with fines and jail time for merely possessing quick-release fertil-

Turf Regulation Without Education

BY JOEL JACKSON



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izer. The law was enacted in January and the commission did hold another hearing on industry's concerns in February. We won't know the outcome of those talks for a while.

In Citrus County, the development order dictated that turfgrass could only receive two fertilizer applications a year at a rate of .5 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. As anyone who knows anything about turfgrass will tell you, there aren't too many plants that can live on 1 pound of nitrogen per year. In this case, regulators chose not to seek much input from industry prior to the order being written.

Once again, we're forced to come along after the fact and somehow, politely and diplomatically, show these bureaucrats how to get the egg stains off their faces.

Bandwagon jumping

There is no provision for regulating fertilizers in Florida, so local authorities are not pre-empted from enacting local laws governing fertilizer use. If the experiences so far this year are any indicator, I'm afraid we may be in for a crazy quilt of regulations as local authorities jump on the environmental bandwagon. Unfortunately, without exploring or seeking the true facts from turf scientists, politicians and bureaucrats stand the likelihood of getting the bandwagon before the horse as they have so far.

Well-managed turfgrass brings a lot of positive benefits to our communities. With the continual urbanization of our once rural areas, maybe there ought to be a law concerning fertilizer use, but it sure ought to be a good one based on science and facts before it goes on the books.

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