

**I**t's been a busy spring here at the Lake Omigosh Golf Club in central Florida. A warm, cloudy winter has sprouted more fungi than superintendent Duffy McDuffy can shake a spray boom at. McDuffy's computer program says darn near every day is a potential disease day. But that's not what he is peeved at right now. It's the politicians trying to regulate fertilizers who are making life miserable for the green industry and state regulators, too.

McDuffy has been so frustrated with these knee-jerk laws popping up that he went to a commission meeting down in Wannabe County and spoke about the need to ban dihydrogen oxide, a corrosive chemical compound that could suffocate people as a liquid and burn people in a gaseous state. The council passed a resolution to seek a ban of this foul substance and thank the gentleman for his proactive citizenship.

After the vote was approved, McDuffy said, "Congratulations, you have just banned water." The commission took a hasty break, and he was not invited back into chambers when the meeting reconvened.

McDuffy says: "With about the same level of scientific knowledge, there are a score of local governments proposing or passing laws based on hearsay and gut feelings. They are writing into law the use of fertilizer products that don't even exist, and banning the application of any fertilizer during whatever they think is the rainy season — some say June to September, others say July to October. They don't understand the unintended consequences of their unscientific folly. Imagine trying to comply with differing fertilizer requirements for 475 cities and 67 counties. It's no way to run a business and surely no way to make a law."

The media, activists and local governments seem to think nutrient runoff and leaching are as certain as the Laws of Gravity and the sun rising in the east. These folks don't or won't understand that too much nitrogen or phosphorus is bad, regardless of the source. Their eyes glaze over when you try to explain that even a slow-release or organic fertilizer has to

## Agronomy Doesn't Mix With Politics

BY JOEL JACKSON



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become soluble to be used by grass. They won't even acknowledge the nutrient loading from their own sewage treatment plants pumping millions of gallons of effluent directly into the waters daily that they are supposedly protecting from fertilizers. Talk about trying to swat the fly on an elephant's butt.

Then McDuffy relayed another whopper: After passing an ordinance banning the sale and use of fast-release fertilizer, a city attorney was asked what constitutes a fast-release fertilizer under the new law. He said, "I don't know! They just told me to write something." We heard later local green industry representatives finally met with the attorney and city council to provide some basic facts about fertilizers. Then the same attorney spent an hour on the phone with the state's Department of Agriculture bureau chief in charge of regulating fertilizers. Word from the regulator is the attorney said, "I wish I had called you six months ago!"

Sadly, we know politics is perception, and these local governments want to be perceived as doing something positive for the local environment. But if they would do a little basic research and reach out to turf professionals, then they would learn about the state's Urban Fertilizer Rule and the Golf and Green Industry BMP manuals that are based on sound proven agronomic facts. If they must pass an ordinance, it should require homeowners, lawn care and golf course businesses alike to follow BMPs, then everybody could be winners.

So long from Lake Omigosh, where the superintendent and crew manage resources, and most homeowners and members still mistakenly think if a little is good, then more is better.

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*Certified superintendent Joel Jackson is director of communications for the Florida GCSA.*