

**W**e have a Ticked Off column in our local paper where folks vent about things that tick them off. Sometimes people sound off on trivial matters. Other times, they opine about larger issues where protocols are ignored and special interests trample common sense and fairness. Into this milieu we plunge, because I'm ticked off.

I'm ticked off that 99 percent of the media stories about water quality lately seem to automatically cite runoff from fertilizer applications as one of the leading causes of the slimy, toxic, suffocating algae blooms fouling our rivers, lakes and bays.

Where's the proof? I'm ticked off because I doubt many reporters or editors have really done much research on nutrient runoff from healthy turfgrass under proper management. They simply print the rhetoric of the activist groups so often that the public assumes it's true.

As a result, emotionally charged local ordinances banning the use of fertilizers during the rainy season (which just also happens to be a plant or lawn's primary growing season) have sprung up around the country — especially in Florida.

The University of Florida recently did a literature search on the fate of fertilizers and the impact of fertilizer bans. Over 140 study citations showed what most of us in the industry already know — that there is very little nutrient loss by runoff or leaching from healthy turf.

When turf gets thin and undernourished, or if people apply fertilizers too early in the spring or too late in the fall, the chances of nutrient loss are in fact greater than when fertilizer is applied to healthy turf. Thus the unintended but proven consequences of fertilizer bans can actually result in more pollution. Those facts are generally not broadcast by the media. I'm ticked off because if you stand up for sound science, the op-ed columnists call your groups heretics in favor of continuing "the pollution."

When activists are called on to supply their peer-reviewed science to justify fertilizer bans, they instead crank up the rhetoric another notch and claim our science is tainted and our land grant university scientists are colluding with agriculture

## Crank Up the Rhetoric

BY JOEL JACKSON



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interests and fertilizer manufacturers. If industry sponsorships and professional association donations don't help fund turf research into the most effective and safest products and methods, who or what will? It won't be the so-called environmentalists, whose real agenda is to stifle growth and raise money with their doomsday messaging.

Fertilizer use is being so savagely and unscientifically targeted because there is seldom a single unified voice of opposition; it's the old divide-and-conquer scenario. I must admit, in most of the city and county ordinances so far, golf courses have not been subjected to bans but are directed to follow sound agronomic practices contained in our Florida Golf BMP manual.

That was the case until recently, when all three proposed drafts of a new county ordinance contained an exemption for agriculture but banned nitrogen and phosphorus use on all turfgrass from June through September. How would golf courses grow in those newly renovated greens installed in the summer "growing season" if people couldn't fertilize them?

According to a county staffer, activists were showing up in large numbers at advisory council meetings and bombarding them with demands. Activists have the time and the money to wage these wars, while we depend on volunteers to take time off to represent science and common sense at these meetings.

The BMP language is still not officially in the final draft ordinance as I write this, but it was looking more hopeful; the Everglades chapter superintendents have been meeting with county staff and commissioners and attending advisory council meetings, bringing the scientific evidence and real world practices to their attention.

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*Certified Superintendent Joel Jackson is executive director of the Florida GCSA.*