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**JOEL JACKSON**, *Contributing Editor*

# Putting greens and politics

**T**hanks to some of the recent legislation and regulation filtering down from Washington to city councils, Big Brother is endorsing and/or passing laws that will affect what products can be used on golf courses, and when and where others can be applied.

Politicians tend to placate the vocal minority who call for bans on the use of fertilizers during the summer “rainy season” months, especially in the Sun Belt sections of the country. Decades of independent research has shown that during the peak growing season, turf and landscape plants utilize all but a very small fraction of the applied nutrients.

Conversely, when nutrients are applied during the slower growth periods like the spring and fall, as mandated by many of the proposed bans, the health and vitality of the turfgrass declines and the amount of nutrients lost rises significantly as the turf thins out. This fact has been most recently documented by an 8-year nutrient management

study done by the University of Florida using funding from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

In 2005, the state of Florida passed the Urban Fertilizer Rule which limited the amount of nitrogen and phosphorous in fertilizer blends sold to homeowners. It also limited the amount of N and P that could be applied per application, per year on golf courses and sports fields. In 2007, Florida then passed the Model Fertilizer Ordinance. This reinforced those stewardship practices and required any county or city to consult with the State Department of Agriculture and the University of Florida scientists if they wanted to draft a more restrictive fertilizer ordinance.

Activists began calling for an all-out war on water quality in 2008 on Florida’s west coast in the Sarasota area citing nutrients as a leading cause of “red tide.” Red tide is the common name for large blooms of brown algae. These occur periodically along the west coast, and have been recorded since the 1800s. Politicians jumped on the bandwagon to “do something” about water quality, as long as it didn’t involve spending lots of money.

Usually, without involving the state or the university, as required in the state ordinance, local governments enacted fertilizer ordinances with seasonal bans on usage. In many of the early ordinances golf courses were given an “exemption.”

The exemption required that superintendents would follow the Golf BMPs, which were published in 2007 as part of a joint effort of the Florida GCSA, the Florida DEP and the University of Florida researchers.

I think this exemption was due in part to the overall efforts of the GCSAA and local chapters in raising awareness of the professionalism of the modern-day superintendent. In several cases local superintendents visited their local commissioners to make them aware of the Golf BMPs.

Advocacy can work, but it is not a guarantee. The west coast wave of ordinances has spread to Florida’s east coast. Like the west coast, counties preempt the state and then cities preempt the county. While many are adopting the state model, the activists have nothing better to do than to court the media and give distorted, one-sided versions of the water quality issue. While our industry has been spared in most of these laws, the activists publicly declared recently, “Golf is next!”

The green industries in Florida have united and are attending commission meetings and writing letters attempting to bring science to the table. Recently, a newspaper down in Ft. Myers published an article declaring that perhaps the bans were indeed more harmful than helpful. Perhaps there is hope for our side.

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