

City of Minneapolis Bans Phosphorus Lawn Fertilizers

In the name of protecting local waterways, the Minneapolis City Council passed an ordinance Sept. 28 limiting the sale and application of lawn fertilizer containing phosphorus. Phosphorus is blamed for unsightly algae blooms in area lakes and streams.

A coalition of suburbs and outstate cities, some of which also have passed such ordinances, will attempt to establish statewide restrictions in Minnesota.

Taken together, the efforts make Minnesota "the beach-head of this movement," according to Jim Skillen, manager of formulator issues for Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE). The Washington, D.C.-based lobbying group represents lawn and garden treatment and pesticide manufacturers and opposes the restrictions.

Recent studies by the University of Minnesota and Hennepin Parks, the suburban park system, have shown that most Minnesota soils, particularly in the metro area, already contain plenty of phosphorus. Advocates of the limits say that adding more to urban lawns creates the risk that more will wind up in bodies of water.

John Barten, water quality manager for Hennepin Parks, said runoff in the metro area carries about a quarter pound of phosphorus from lawn fertilizer from every acre in the metro area. Of that, most runs through sewer systems and filtration devices, which can remove about 60 percent of it. Some, particularly after heavy rains, runs directly into lakes

and streams. One pound of phosphorus can nourish 500 pounds of algae, Barten said.

Eliminating or neutralizing phosphorus - through ponds, basins, chemicals, street sweeping or other strategies - averages about \$375 per pound, Barten said. The Chain of Lakes Clean Water Partnership, a consortium of local governments, spent \$11 million over the past seven years for a variety of water-quality improvements, many of them aimed at phosphorus reduction.

Barten's studies have shown that about half of the phosphorus in runoff comes from lawns, and almost all of the rest from streets and driveways. But fertilizer industry groups argue that fertilizer restrictions don't address phosphorus sources such as Canada goose and pet feces, much less agricultural land. They're supported in part by a University of Wisconsin Department of Soil Sciences study that concluded that failing to maintain a lawn with phosphorus could result in more erosion and runoff.

The Minneapolis ordinance will prohibit all lawn fertilizer with phosphorus except on new lawns or where a soil test has shown a phosphorus deficiency. Organic fertilizers, which generally contain relatively low levels of nutrients, also will be allowed - a loophole opponents have criticized.

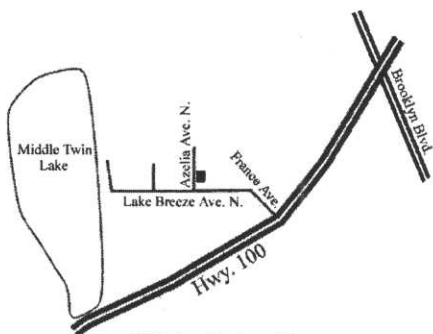
The ordinance also will apply to commercial lawn services, and violators can be fined up to \$300. The ordinance takes effect in January.



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