



TAKING CHARGE OF OUR ENVIRONMENT

URBAN FERTILIZER COUNCIL EDUCATES ON RESPONSIBLE FERTILIZER USE

Protecting the environment is a priority for Canadians. The fertilizer industry wants to show them how they can do that and at the same time enjoy bountiful gardens, healthy green yards and sports fields. The Canadian Fertilizer Institute and the companies that sell plant nutrient products designed for use around residences, parks and golf courses have created the Urban Fertilizer Council to help homeowners and turf management professionals understand how to look after their properties safely and properly.

The Council's emphasis is on promoting stewardship of the environment and providing homeowners, park managers, groundskeepers and municipal leaders with science-based information so they can make decisions on the best kind of fertilizer to use and other landscaping practices, says Clyde Graham, Vice-President of the Canadian Fertilizer Institute.

"We all have a responsibility to protect our environment and our waterways," Graham says. "Almost everything we do and the choices we make can affect the world we live in. Fertilizer use is no exception. Using fertilizer to create healthy lawns and parks is consistent with protecting the environment."

In the ongoing debate about protecting the health of backyards, parks and golf courses, professional turf managers often

find themselves looking for handy and reliable information to counter critics of fertilizer use.

There are plenty of sources of science-based data that turf managers can turn to. The Urban Fertilizer Council aims to make it easier to quickly access the kind of information they need when fielding queries about their use of fertilizers on city green spaces or responding to calls for banning lawn and garden fertilizers.

The Council was formed by companies that supply lawn fertilizers with the intention of proactively communicating to consumers about the responsible use of fertilizers and protecting the urban environment as well as lakes and rivers. It sees turf managers as key players in delivering the message about responsible fertilizer use because their job puts them at the centre of the debate and their education and

experience is connected with how best to care for green spaces.

The message for turf managers to deliver can be as simple as educating homeowners to follow directions on fertilizer bags and providing tips on spreading fertilizer that so it won't harm the environment.

The Council's approach is built around the Canadian Fertilizer Institute's trademarked *Right Product@Right Rate, Right Time, Right Place* system. Originally developed in connection with agricultural practices, the basic principles of the 4Rs applies to anyone using fertilizer. In other words, having the right fertilizer for what the soil on your property needs, applying it as directed when plants can absorb it and keeping it on the intended lawn or garden are guiding principles to follow.

The Urban Fertilizer Council believes that voluntary nutrient management programs based on sound science, expert advice and public education are the best approach. Applying too much fertilizer is simply wasteful and can harm the soil or cause losses to the environment. At the same time, too little fertilizer can leave plants and crops stunted for a lack of nutrients. But used in the right way, fertilizers keep lawns, parks, sports fields and golf courses green and healthy.

Let's focus on the facts: healthy grass produces oxygen and consumes carbon dioxide that contributes to greenhouse gases. Green spaces help absorb excess heat in urban areas and prevent soil runoff that clogs waterways. A good lawn or park absorbs rainwater and filters it through the soil rather than letting it run straight into water courses.

It's also important to tell the public that fertilizers are safe. As the Canadian Fertilizer Institute notes, "Air is about 78% nitrogen, but most plants can't use it directly. Nitrogen fertilizers, which are manufactured from the nitrogen in the atmosphere, supply this nutrient in a form that plants can easily use. Phosphorus comes from fossil remains found in phosphate rock, and potash fertilizers come from ancient seabed deposits."

Handy sources of information include: Urban Fertilizer Council, www.cfi.ca/urbanfertilizer.asp; Canadian Fertilizer Institute, www.cfi.ca; International Plant Nutrition Institute www.ipni.net. ♦