

Question & Answer

with Rutgers University

By Brad Park and Dr. Jim Murphy., Rutgers University

Q: I am being told by my facility manager that using weed preventer or weed killer on school grounds is illegal. Can anyone shed some light on this?

A: Herbicide use (i.e. weed preventers, weed killers, etc) is permissible on school sports fields and grounds as long as the application(s) is made in accordance with the New Jersey School IPM Act. The specifics of the Law can be found at the website of the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Pest Management Office: <http://www.pestmanagement.rutgers.edu/IPM/SchoolIPM/index.htm>

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) calls for employing a variety of strategies (i.e. proper mowing, fertilization, seeding, cultivation, irrigation, etc), in lieu of routine pesticide applications, to keep pest within acceptable limits. However, IPM does allow for synthetic pesticide use to manage pest problems when limits have been exceeded.

For example, it is NOT consistent with the principles of IPM to make a postemergence broadleaf herbicide application for control of white clover and dandelions when weeds are not present.

As another IPM example, documentation/records should be generated indicating those sports fields and grounds locations where crabgrass populations have exceeded acceptable limits in August and September. Late summer and fall cultural strategies should include cultivation, seeding, fertilization, regular mowing and proper irrigation. Implementation of these practices should also be documented. In spring of the following year, the use of a preemergence herbicide should be based on whether or not additional seed is required. If turf cover is still lacking, the choice should be to seed and not apply a preemergence herbicide as most preemergence herbicides will also inhibit the establishment of new seedings. If turf cover is deemed sufficient, and documentation has been generated indicating that the field has a history of crabgrass encroachment, the application of a preemergence herbicide is justifiable.

Note that the New Jersey School IPM Act requires consideration of low-impact pesticide options when solving pest problems. Corn gluten meal is a low-impact pesticide that can provide some preemergence control of crabgrass. However, limited product efficacy should be expected where crabgrass populations have been severe and where application rates are limited by the 2011 NJ Fertilizer Law.

Additional resources on the School IPM Act include: Rutgers Cooperative Extension Pest Management Office, (o) 848.932.9801; and New Jersey Dept. of Environmental Protection Pesticide Control Program, (o) 609.984.6507

I hope this helps to clarify this often confusing issue. - bsp

Q: I understand that an organic program is not only environmentally correct but fast becoming a politically correct direction to move with athletic field fertility. If a person has been in diligent in his fertilizer program and to date has balanced P & K in the soil to where there is little or none required, it would seem an organic fertilizer cannot be utilized since there are none (to my knowledge) that do not include P & K in their composition.

A: There are not many organic fertilizers that do not contain P and/or K but there are some including: Blood Meal is made from dried slaughterhouse waste and is one of the highest non-synthetic sources of nitrogen. If over-applied, it can burn plants with excessive ammonia.

Feather Meal is sourced from poultry slaughter and meal has fairly high nitrogen levels but is slow to release the nitrogen

Corn gluten meal materials have a high percentage of nitrogen. It carries a warning to allow 1 to 4 months of decomposition in the soil prior to seeding. Allelopathic properties will inhibit the germination of seeds. However, there is no danger to established or transplanted plants. This product is also marketed as a pre-emergent weed control for annual grasses in lawns.

See <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/mg/gardennotes/234.html#alfalfa> for more examples of organic fertilizers.

Note that NJ law allows certified and trained professionals to apply organic fertilizers containing available phosphate as long as the application rate is no more than 0.25 pounds of available phosphate per 1,000 square feet, which, for many organic fertilizers, greatly restricts how much nitrogen can be applied with that product. See https://profact.rutgers.edu/Pages/training_module.aspx?CID=48 for more details on phosphate restrictions in NJ. – JAM

Q: I was hoping I could ask you for your opinion on the following. We are going to be having our soccer/lacrosse game field scalped, mix in some sand without topsoil as the field is tilled about 6 inches down. We have good draining soil and a

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