

Urban Turf Fertilizer Rule

By Dale W. Dubberly

At the direction of former Governor Bush, the South Florida Water Management District and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection developed the Lake Okeechobee and Estuary Recovery Plan. FDACS was to revise fertilizer content standards for use in urban settings in cooperation with manufacturers and IFAS. The new rule will require that all fertilizer products labeled for use on urban turf or lawns and sports turf be limited to the amount of nitrogen and phosphorous available to support healthy turf maintenance. The rule will protect water quality by restricting phosphorous and nitrogen application rates in fertilizers for urban turf and lawns.

"We are committed to protecting Florida's water resources. By establishing responsible nitrogen and phosphorus use rates statewide, Florida's citizens can continue to care for their lawns and landscapes without sacrificing water quality."

*– Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) Commissioner
Charles H. Bronson*

Definitions

1. **"Urban Turf" or "Lawns"** – non-agricultural land planted in closely mowed, managed grasses except golf courses, parks & athletic fields.
2. **"Sports Turf"** – non-agricultural land planted exclusively for golf courses, parks & athletic fields.
3. **"No Phosphate Fertilizer"** – fertilizer products with phosphate levels below 0.5% intended for established urban turf or lawns.
4. **"Low Phosphate Fertilizer"** – fertilizer products intended for new or established urban turf or lawns, with phosphate levels equal to or above 0.5% & shall have use directions that do not exceed 0.25lbs P₂O₅ per 1000 sq. ft.
5. **"Starter Fertilizer"** – fertilizer formulated for a one-time application at planting or near that time to encourage root growth & enhance the initial establishment.
6. **"Established Urban Turf"** – urban turf older than 12 months.
7. **"New Urban Turf"** – turf established less than 12 months.

Q & A

General

Q- What is the effective date of the rule?

A- December 31, 2007. However, fertilizer licenses will have until July 1, 2009 to change labels for compliance.

Q- Will products in the channels of trade after July 1, 2009 be allowed to be sold?

A- Yes, existing stock in the marketplace will be allowed to be sold at the retail level, provided they were shipped to the retail outlet prior to July 1. Products shipped after July 1, 2009 will be stop-saled.

Q- Who will enforce the Urban Turf Rule?

A- The Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services.

Q- Will Specialty Fertilizers labeled for turf or lawns shall have directions for use?

A- Yes.

- **Phosphate:** A maximum of 0.25 lbs P₂O₅ / 1000 sq. ft. per application & not exceed 0.5 lbs P₂O₅ / 1000 sq. ft. per year. Application rates above these levels would require a soil sample of the application site to justify an increase in P₂O₅.

- **Nitrogen:** A maximum of 0.7 lbs of readily available nitrogen per 1000 sq. ft. at any one time based on the soluble fraction of nitrogen formulated in the fertilizer. A maximum of 1 lb total (N) per 1000 sq. ft. to be applied at any one time, not exceeding the annual nitrogen recommendations in the Fertilizer Guidelines for Established Turf Grass Lawns in Three Regions of Florida. Application rates above these levels would require a turf tissue test at the application site to justify the increase in (N).

**Fertilization Guidelines for Established Turfgrass Lawns in Three Regions of Florida*
Nitrogen Recommendations
(lbs N / 1000 sq. ft. / year)**

Species	North	Central	South
Bahia grass	2-3	2-4	2-4
Bermuda grass	3-5	4-6	5-7
Centipede grass	1-2	2-3	2-3
St. Augustine grass	2-4	2-5	4-6
Zoysia grass	3-5	3-6	4-6

* *North Florida* is north of Ocala. *Central Florida* is defined as south of Ocala to a line extending from Vero Beach to Tampa. *South Florida* includes the remaining southern portion of the state.

- Q- **When will analytical testing begin to evaluate fertilizer products for compliance with this rule change?**
 - A- For those products whose label(s) currently meet the proposed changes, testing will begin the effective date of the rule change. Fertilizer licensees have 1 ½ years after the effective date of the rule change to bring their products into compliance & clear their existing stock from the channels of trade. As product labels are revised & brought into compliance, then those products will be analyzed & evaluated for conformity.
- Q- **Will fertilizer / pesticide combination products create any issues with the EPA?**
 - A- No. The environmental caution statement is the same labeling requirement for EPA, as well as the Florida

Urban Turf Rule.

- Q- **Does the Urban Turf Rule apply to products used for Landscape & Ornamental applications?**
 - A- No. If "TURF" is expressed on the label of the product being offered for sale, the Urban Turf Rule would apply.

Homeowner's Lawn Fertilizer

- Q- **What impact will the rule have on the fertilizer products I use on my lawn?**
 - A- The rule will require the directions for use to limit the amount of phosphate & nitrogen you can apply in a single application & per year.
- Q- **What about lawn fertilizers labeled for use as starter fertilizer?**
 - A- These products are intended for a one-time application at planting to encourage root growth & shall have directions for use that do not exceed an application rate of 1.0 lb of P₂O₅ / 1000 sq. ft.
- Q- **Will there be any major changes to product labels?**
 - A- Yes. Prominently displayed on the front of the bag there shall be a statement showing the maximum coverage area stated in square feet. *Example: This bag covers 5000 sq. ft.* It will also require the following precautionary statement: "*Do not apply near water, storm drains or drainage ditches. Do not apply if heavy rain is expected. Apply this product only to your lawn / garden, and sweep any product that lands on the driveway, sidewalk, or street, back onto your lawn / garden.*"

Sports Turf

- Q- **Would fertilizer intended for use on sports turf require directions for use for phosphate & nitrogen?**
 - A- Yes. They must be consistent with the direction for use on home owner's lawns, unless the documents SL191, "Recommendations for N,P,K & Mg for Golf Course & Athletic Field Fertilization Base on Mehlich I Extractant" (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/SS404>) or "BMP's

for Enhancement of Environmental Quality on Florida's Golf Courses" (<http://www.dep.state.fl.us/water/nonpoint/docs/nonpoint/glfbmp07.pdf>) are referenced on the product label or shipping documents.

Urban Turf

Q- Would fertilizers used on urban turf by Lawn Maintenance companies be required to have directions for use that limit the application of phosphate & nitrogen?

A- Yes.

They must be consistent for use on home owner's lawns unless the document titled "Best Management Practices for Protection of Water Resources in Florida, June 2002, Florida Green Industries" are referenced on the label. Copies may be obtained from DEP at http://www.dep.state.fl.us/water/nonpoint/docs/nonpoint/BMP_Book_final.pdf.

For further information about the Urban Turf Fertilizer Rule, please contact Bill Cox at (850) 487-2085.

Or visit our website at www.FLAES.org