



YOUR LAWN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

# New phosphorus lawn fertilizer law aims to protect Minnesota lakes and rivers

Minnesota has recently passed a law that restricts the use of lawn fertilizers containing phosphorus, the primary nutrient that turns lakes green with algae.

## New Phosphorus Law

Starting January 1, 2004, **fertilizers containing phosphorus cannot be used on lawns in the Twin Cities metro area** (Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott and Washington counties). Greater Minnesota is restricted to lawn fertilizers with 3 percent or less phosphate content (with fertilizer, phosphorus is measured as *phosphate*). Look for the middle number on a bag of fertilizer. For the metro area, it should be zero (0) and in Greater Minnesota it should be three (3).

**Keep fertilizer off paved surfaces:** It's illegal to spread any fertilizer on hard surfaces such as streets, sidewalks, and driveways. Rain can wash the fertilizer into nearby storm drains or road ditches, eventually getting into a lake or river near you. If you accidentally spill or spread fertilizer on a hard surface, clean it up immediately.

## Exemptions

Fertilizers containing phosphorus may be used on lawns if a soil test indicates that it is needed or if you are establishing a new lawn.

These restrictions do not apply to fertilizers used for agricultural crops, flower and vegetable gardening, or on golf courses by trained staff.



**DO THE GREEN THING: FERTILIZE RESPONSIBLY** Many garden centers and hardware stores now carry phosphorus-free lawn fertilizers.

## Will phosphorus-free fertilizer keep my lawn healthy?

While phosphorus is necessary to grow healthy lawns, soils in many parts of Minnesota already have an adequate amount. In these instances, adding more phosphorus in fertilizer is not needed and will not benefit your lawn. Healthy lawns can be maintained with phosphorus-free fertilizers.

## THE PROBLEM: TOO GREEN



**GREEN AND MUCKY** Excess algae and weed growth is a major problem in many Minnesota lakes and waterways.



**MORE PHOSPHORUS, LESS FISH** Too much algae lowers oxygen levels and darkens the water. This can have a devastating effect on fish populations.

## What to look for

On any bag or box of fertilizer, there is a string of three numbers. The middle number indicates phosphorus content and should read "0" in the Twin Cities seven-county metropolitan area, and "3" or less in Greater Minnesota.



# What can you do to protect water quality?

Fertilizers, leaves, grass clippings, eroded soil, and animal waste are all sources of phosphorus. When they are swept or washed into the nearest street or storm drain, they end up in your local lake or river. You can do your part to protect water quality by doing the following:



- ▶ Follow Minnesota's new phosphorus lawn fertilizer law.
- ▶ Keep leaves and lawn clippings out of your gutters, streets, and ditches.
- ▶ Clean lawn and garden equipment on the grass, not on hard surfaces. Never wash or blow soil or grass clippings into the street.
- ▶ Pick up pet waste promptly. Pet waste can contain harmful bacteria as well as nutrients. Never drop pet waste in the street or ditches.
- ▶ Control soil erosion around your house. When left bare, soil is easily washed away with rain, carrying phosphorus with it. Soil erosion can be prevented by keeping soil covered with vegetation or mulch.



**SWEEP IT UP** Grass clippings and leaves left on streets and sidewalks are a major source of phosphorus.

## Find out what you need: Test your soil

A soil test is a good idea, especially if you are concerned that your lawn may need phosphorus.



Instructions on soil testing are available through the University of Minnesota Extension Service's INFO-U by calling 612-624-2200 (metro) or 1-800-525-8636 and requesting message 468.

Soil testing information can also be obtained through the Internet by visiting [www.extension.umn.edu](http://www.extension.umn.edu) and searching for "Lawn Soil Testing."

A list of laboratories certified for soil testing by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture can be found at [www.mda.state.mn.us/appd/soilabs.htm](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/appd/soilabs.htm).

Visit [www.reduce.org](http://www.reduce.org) for lots of ideas about reducing waste and toxic chemicals in your day-to-day life.

[reduce.org](http://www.reduce.org)

## To obtain additional copies of this fact sheet

contact Office of Environmental Assistance's **Education Clearinghouse** at 1-800-877-6300, 651-215-0232 or e-mail: [clearinghouse@moea.state.mn.us](mailto:clearinghouse@moea.state.mn.us).

## For more information on lawn care

- ▶ The **Yard & Garden Line** is the University of Minnesota Extension Service's one-stop telephone link to information about plants and insects in the home landscape. Call 612-624-4771, or (toll free) 1-888-624-4771 in Greater Minnesota.
- ▶ University of Minnesota **Extension Service's web site**: [www.extension.umn.edu](http://www.extension.umn.edu). From the home page click on "Garden" then on "Lawns."
- ▶ University of Minnesota Extension Service - **Sustainable Urban Landscape Information Series (SULIS)**: [www.sustland.umn.edu](http://www.sustland.umn.edu). From the home page, click on "Maintenance" then on "Lawn care."
- ▶ **Minnesota Department of Agriculture**: [www.mda.state.mn.us](http://www.mda.state.mn.us). From the home page, click on "Water & Land," then on "Lawn Care & Water Quality."

