

# Seminole considers rules to limit lawn fertilizer use

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Seminole County commissioners are considering new rules on when and how property owners can apply fertilizer to their lawns in an effort to protect the county's lakes, rivers and ponds from excessive algae growth.

"Nitrogen and phosphates found in fertilizers have been identified as significant contributors to surface water and groundwater pollution," said Kim Ornberg, Seminole's watershed division manager.

At a recent County Commission meeting, more than a dozen residents urged Seminole leaders to enact regulations that would reduce the amount of nutrients washing off residents' and business owners' lawns and into gutters, storm drains and ultimately lakes and rivers.

"We know that what goes into our lawns goes into our waterways," said Nancy Dunn of Apopka. "And fertilizers are the number one enemy of clean water."

According to a draft ordinance prepared by county staff, property owners would be prohibited from applying fertilizers from June 1 through Sept. 30. They also would not be allowed to fertilize within 10 feet of a water body's shoreline, or in an area that received 2 or more inches of rain within a 24-hour period.

The restrictions mirror those enacted by Tampa several years ago. Orlando also passed new fertilizer restrictions in 2013.

Todd Josko, representing TruGreen, a national lawn-care company, told Seminole commissioners his company doesn't oppose a fertilizer ordinance. Rather, it objects to some of the restrictions, including the summertime blackout period.

"Our employees go through training and education to learn the proper application of fertilizer," Josko said. "We all agree that algae blooms are caused by excess nitrogen and phosphorus and there is nitrogen and phosphorus in fertilizers...But properly applied fertilizer to help lawn care or keep a healthy turf - particularly in the summer months, when turf is able to absorb nutrients at an extremely efficient rate - it stays put. It doesn't leach into the ground. It doesn't run off."

Commissioner Bob Dallari said officials from Seminole's seven cities should meet with county employees to come up with an ordinance that applies countywide, not just in unincorporated areas.

Commissioner Brenda Carey said she had too many questions about the fertilizing prohibition during the summer months and other restrictions before she could approve the ordinance.

Commissioners then agreed to write a new ordinance and said they plan to vote on it by December.

However, Commissioner Lee Constantine urged his fellow commissioners to move forward quickly.

"If we do not act, then we are simply passing the baton to our children and our grandchildren and making them pay for cleanup," he said.

Longwood resident Pam Meharg said taxpayers eventually end up picking up the cost of cleaning a lake polluted with algae.

"We know excess nitrates cause algae blooms," she said. "The problems with Lake Apopka are about fertilizer...It is much cheaper to address this problem up front."