

Response to The Ledger, “Who said lush lawns were a good idea?” by Mr. Tom Palmer

The July 7, 2018 blog by Mr. Tom Palmer on fertilizer ordinances offers an opportunity for a very different point of view.

All Floridians should be rightly focused on conserving water and protecting water quality. No argument there. Unfortunately, the blog relies on false narratives and generalizations which are not supported by science.

First, our industry supports the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (FDEP) model fertilizer ordinance. It is not a “so-called model ordinance”. It is THE model ordinance for the State of Florida as created and updated by the FDEP. It was promulgated after considerable time and effort by a broad inclusive stakeholder group. Polk County got it exactly right!

Some local governments however choose to be more restrictive than the model, to which there is no meaningful obstacle. So be it. However, they sometimes create ordinances that punish the innocent along with the guilty. What do we mean by that? It's easy to understand with this parallel. Do we punish ALL drivers for the actions of drunk drivers? Of course not!

As to fertilizer use, some ordinances strangely provide no exemption for licensed lawn care professionals – the good drivers. They get lumped in with the ignorant and careless “drunk drivers” who fertilize their driveways and blow their clippings into the storm drain. Applying that logic to drunk driving would mean, well, no driving at all – for anyone. If you are a good driver, an expert driver, that outcome is very hard to take.

Obviously then, the ordinances written in this way are activist policy, not evidence-based policy. Consequently, they are intentionally punitive and discriminatory to the people who are really the first line of defense in responsible landscape management. There is ZERO peer-reviewed science to support such an approach, or that such ordinances have accomplished anything.

Are they supported by FDEP? No. By the Florida Department of Agriculture? No. By any of the state's water management districts? No. By any relevant academic institutions? No.

Guided by peer-reviewed research and cultures of using minimum inputs, these professionals are carelessly lumped in with the bad actors in the name of “doing something”. Fertilizers applied properly at statutorily-approved rates by these responsible operators present NO danger to water quality – period.

If you don't want to take our word for it, local governments like Citrus County have more recently adopted winter blackouts, with exemptions for licensed lawn care professionals. This cures another glaring problem with the old blackout "model" – it allows for feeding landscapes during the growing season when they efficiently take up nutrients rather than compelling homeowners to apply fertilizer when their landscapes are in or near dormancy. Common sense, right? Also, Orange County and its Environmental Protection Commission both recently voted unanimously to MAINTAIN their exemption for licensed lawn care professionals, originally passed in 2009. Impaired water bodies in Orange County are coming OFF their lists because they rightly focus on education. Now that's effective policy making.

Finally, the blog disappointingly engages in some of the drive-by bullying and insults of calling anyone who doesn't agree with its point of view as "entrenched economic interests", etc., etc. Unprofessional to be sure, but not unexpected.

**Mac Carraway, Executive Director
Environmental Research & Education Foundation (EREF)**

EREF is a non-profit industry association located in Lakeland, Florida. Its mission is to protect Florida's environment and natural resources through the funding of environmental research and the sharing of sound scientific findings on the environmental and human-health benefits of properly maintained greenspaces and urban landscapes.