FACTSHEET

Massachusetts Plant Nutrient Regulations: Non-Agricultural Turf and Lawns

Why were plant nutrient regulations implemented?

In 2012, the Massachusetts Legislature passed *An Act Relative to the Regulation of Plant Nutrients* (Act). The Act directed the Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) to develop regulations to ensure that plant nutrients are applied in an effective manner to provide sufficient nutrients for maintaining healthy agricultural and non-agricultural land (turf and lawns), while minimizing the impacts of the nutrients on surface and ground water resources to protect human health and the environment.

What do the regulations involve?

The Act and regulations[i] establish standards for applications of plant nutrients, including limitations on phosphorus-containing fertilizer, to non-agricultural turf and lawns. The regulations also enhance the ability of municipalities to maximize the credits relative to storm water discharge or similar permits issued by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The regulations also address plant nutrient applications to agricultural land, which are summarized in a separate factsheet. The regulations became effective on June 5, 2015. Amended regulations were published on January 12, 2018.

Who will likely be impacted by these regulations?

In general, these regulations impact anyone who applies plant nutrients (including commercial fertilizer and various other plant nutrient materials) to both agricultural and non-agricultural land (lawns and turf). Record-keeping requirements for non-agricultural applications only apply to professional applicators.

What do these regulations require?

Homeowners and professionals are required to obey plant nutrient application restrictions and follow University of Massachusetts Amherst Extension Guidelines (UMass Guidelines) for nutrient management when applying plant nutrients on non-agricultural turf and lawns.

Specific restrictions and requirements for turf and lawns:

- Phosphorus-containing fertilizer may only be applied when a soil test indicates that it is needed or when turf or a lawn is being established, patched or renovated.
- When applying plant nutrients, such as animal manure, fertilizer, organic compost, natural organic fertilizer, biosolids, agricultural byproducts, digestate, or combination thereof, the following shall apply:
  - the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus must be known and accounted for;
  - a soil test is available for the application site; and
  - the application of these materials shall not exceed the phosphorus rates for maintenance or renovation of turf or lawn as specified in UMass Guidelines.

  - These requirements shall not apply to:
    - a single application made within a 12 month period at an application rate not to exceed 0.25 lbs of P_2O_5 per 1,000 square feet; or
    - any product used containing 0.67% or less available P_2O_5.

- No applications of plant nutrients shall be made:
  - to frozen and/or snow covered soil;
  - to saturated soil, or soils that are frequently flooded;
  - within 20 feet of waterways if using a broadcast method, or 10 feet if using a more targeted application method, such as a drop spreader;
  - within a Zone I of a public water supply well or within 100 feet of surface waters that are used for public drinking water supply;
  - in amounts that exceed UMass Guidelines for plant nutrient application rates to turf; or
  - to drought dormant, cold dormant, inactive or otherwise brown turf.

- Application of biosolids shall comply with the regulatory requirements for land application of such materials (330 CMR 32.00).
- Soil tests for nutrient analysis shall be obtained from the UMass Extension Soil Testing Lab or a laboratory using methods and procedures recommended by UMass. A soil test is valid for 3 years.
- Record keeping of plant nutrient applications to lawn and turf is required for professional applicators. Information to be recorded, when applicable, includes site location and size, soil test results, date of application, type and amount of plant nutrients applied.

Retailer Requirements

Retailers who sell phosphorus-containing fertilizer are required to:

- Display phosphorus-containing fertilizer products separate from non-phosphorus fertilizer products; and
- Post a sign displaying language informing the consumer about phosphorus-containing fertilizer restrictions for turf and lawns.[ii]

Enforcement

MDAR has the statutory enforcement authority and may impose an administrative penalty for violations of any provisions in these regulations.

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[i] Information on Plant Nutrient Regulations: https://www.mass.gov/plant-nutrient-management

[ii] 330 31.08 requires the following language: "PHOSPHORUS RUNOFF POSES A THREAT TO WATER QUALITY. THEREFORE, UNDER MASSACHUSETTS LAW, PHOSPHORUS CONTAINING FERTILIZER MAY ONLY BE APPLIED TO LAWN OR NON-AGRICULTURAL TURF WHEN (i) a Soil Test indicates that additional phosphorus is needed for the growth of that Lawn or Non-agricultural Turf; or (ii) is used for newly established Lawn or Non-agricultural Turf during the first growing season."