Urban Turf Fertilizer Rule Update

In 2007, the South Florida Water Management District and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection developed the Lake Okeechobee and Estuary Recovery Plan. FDACS was required to revise fertilizer content standards for use in urban settings in cooperation with manufacturers and IFAS.

A rule was developed that required 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 phosphorus and nitrogen application rates in fertilizers for urban turf and lawns.

On January 8, 2015, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services adopted changes to the statewide Urban Turf Fertilizer Rule 5E-1.003 F.A.C. The changes were in response to the culmination of 8 years of turf research conducted by the University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences turf scientists. This research was funded by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

What are the notable changes to the Urban Turf Rule?

- Limits nitrogen applications to 1 pound total nitrogen per 1000 sq. ft. during the fall or winter.
- If a total controlled release form of nitrogen is applied, not more than 35 percent of the nitrogen in the controlled release fertilizer can be released within the first 7 days after application.
- Modification to the nitrogen application recommendations in the “Annual Fertilization Guidelines”
- Recommendation to only apply to actively growing turf.

✔ No application of nitrogen in the winter months in North Florida.
✔ Limits nitrogen applications rates to 1 pound per application in the fall and winter months in central and south Florida.
✔ Reduced the maximum annual pounds of nitrogen for Zoysia grass.

- Included the following statements in the required precautionary language —

✔ “Apply only to actively growing turf”
✔ “Check with your local Cooperative Extension Agency to obtain specific information on local turf best management practices”
✔ “Check with your county or city government to determine if there are local regulations for fertilizer use”
Application Limits – Only Apply to Actively Growing
Turf -Maximum Pounds N per Application-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Spring or Summer</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Maximum Annual Pounds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bahiagrass</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bermuda</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centipede</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Augustine</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoysia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2-3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Florida is defined as north of a line extending from Cedar Key to Daytona Beach. Central Florida is defined as south of the line extending from Cedar Key to Daytona Beach to a line extending from Tampa to Vero Beach. South Florida includes the remaining southern portion of the state.

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.

Q- Who enforces the Urban Turf Rule?
A- The Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services.

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 ft².

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 coverage area stated in square feet. Example: This bag covers 5000 sq. ft.

It will also require the following precautionary statement: “Apply only to actively growing turf. 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, and sweep any product that lands in the driveway, sidewalk, or street, back onto your lawn. Check with your local Cooperative Extension Agency to obtain specific information on local turf best management practices. Check with your county or city government to determine if there are local regulations for fertilizer use.

The complete rule can be accessed at https://www.flrules.org/gateway/RuleNo.asp?title=FERTILIZER&ID=5E-1.003
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 Using Mehlich I Extractant”, revision: October 2013 (http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/SS404) or “BMP’s for Enhancement of Environmental Quality on Florida’s Golf Courses” dated September 2012 (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, 2010, Florida Green Industries” are referenced on the label. Copies may be obtained from DEP at http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/GIBMP_Manual_WEB_2_17_11.pdf

If you have questions or need additional information contact:

Steven Harley
Environmental Specialist III

Bureau of Licensing and Enforcement
Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
3125 Conner Boulevard, Building #8
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1650
Telephone: (850) 617-7883

Email: Steven.Harley@freshfromflorida.com