

NEWS RELEASE

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County Board Approves Ban on Future Sale and Use of Phosphorus-Based Fertilizers

Minimizing phosphorus run-off will improve water quality

The County Board tonight approved a local law banning the sale and use of lawn fertilizer containing phosphorus within the county. A phase-in period will allow suppliers and retail stores to sell off their existing stock.

The no-phosphorus fertilizers are required to be introduced in Westchester markets by January 2011. To minimize nutrient run-off that can result from other components in fertilizer, such as nitrogen, the law also prohibits any lawn fertilizer applications between December 1 and April 1.

"With this new law, we aim to make the spring lawn 'green-up' a little more earth-friendly," said County Legislator Tom Abinanti (D-IN-WF, Greenburgh), chair of the Environment & Energy Committee.

The phosphorus fertilizer ban was proposed by the County Executive and extensively reviewed and modified in committee to address concerns raised by lawn care professionals. Abinanti said that many soils in Westchester already have high phosphorus content, thus negating a need for additional lawn fertilization. He noted that the law does not apply when a new lawn has been planted or phosphorus is otherwise necessary.

"Restricting the use of phosphorus fertilizers is a major step in tackling a water pollution crisis that threatens more of our watershed areas every day," said County Executive Andy Spano. "If not used properly, fertilizer can wash off yards and driveways and go directly into our streams and reservoirs. This legislation would impose inexpensive and common sense guidelines for the use of all fertilizers and help residents make better decisions when it comes to maintaining healthy lawns and gardens."

Phosphorus and nitrogen contributes to eutrophication or 'algae blooms' in surface water bodies, as seen in several drinking water reservoirs in northern Westchester County, Long Island Sound and other water bodies. Treatment processes to clear "algae blooms" in drinking water are costly and can produce harmful disinfection by-products. The December 1 to April 1 ban will reduce nutrient runoff during a period when soils are frozen or when plants are typically dormant.