

# Recommendations for handling existing stock of phosphorus lawn fertilizer in the seven county Twin Cities metro area

## ISSUE

Now that phosphorus lawn fertilizer use is restricted in Minnesota, cities and other units of government may be asked by the public “What should I do with my leftover bag of phosphorus lawn fertilizer?”

## THE LAW

As of January 2004, phosphorus lawn fertilizer is not to be used on established lawns in the seven county Twin Cities metro area unless a current soil test shows a need for phosphorus. Phosphorus lawn fertilizer can be used when establishing new lawns, either by seeding or laying sod. The law restricts use of phosphorus lawn fertilizers on lawns, not its sale. Full details on the law are available at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s website: [www.mda.state.mn.us/appd/ace/lawncwaterq.htm](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/appd/ace/lawncwaterq.htm).

## READING THE BAG

Phosphorus lawn fertilizers are lawn fertilizers that have a number other than a zero in the middle of the string of three numbers showing the fertilizer’s analysis. For example, a fertilizer with 22-3-15 on the bag contains phosphorus; a bag labeled with 22-0-15, does not.

## OPTIONS FOR EXISTING PHOSPHORUS LAWN FERTILIZER USE

The law applies only to lawn fertilization, and the zero phosphorus restriction applies only to the seven county Twin Cities metro area (in non-metro areas, a 3% phosphate restriction applies). This provides several alternatives for use or disposal of phosphorus lawn fertilizer:

### Alternatives for handling phosphorus lawn fertilizers that contain pesticides:

(Typically containing herbicides for weed control or insecticides for insect control.)

1. Use the fertilizer on lawns outside of the seven county Twin Cities metro area where it is legal to do so. It is not advisable, however, to use phosphorus lawn fertilizers in areas near lakes.
2. Take to a county household hazardous waste collection site. Call your county government information phone number or visit your county government website for locations.
3. Do not use lawn fertilizers that contain pesticides on gardens or any other area that is not a lawn!

### Alternatives for handling phosphorus lawn fertilizers that do not contain pesticides:

1. Use on vegetable and flower gardens. However, realize that unlike typical garden fertilizer, lawn fertilizer can be relatively high in nitrogen and low in phosphorus and potassium. Apply no more than 1.5 cups of lawn fertilizer to 100 sq. ft. (10' X 10') and plan to soil test after three years to assure plant nutrient needs are being met. An additional 1 cup of lawn fertilizer per 100 sq. ft. can be applied as a sidedress on sweet corn, vine crops, tomatoes, potatoes and cole crops 3-4 weeks after planting.
2. Use the fertilizer on lawns outside of the seven county Twin Cities metro area where it is legal to do so. It is not advisable, however, to use phosphorus lawn fertilizers in areas near lakes.
3. Place in trash.

## FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE LAW AND LAWNS

For information on the Minnesota Phosphorus Lawn Fertilizer Law, visit the Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s website at [www.mda.state.mn.us/appd/ace/lawncwaterq.htm](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/appd/ace/lawncwaterq.htm) or call 651-296-6121.

For information on lawn care, visit the University of Minnesota Extension Service’s Yard and Garden Line at [www.extension.umn.edu](http://www.extension.umn.edu) or call 612-624-4771.



A “zero in the middle” indicates this fertilizer is phosphorus-free. A number other than zero indicates the fertilizer contains phosphorus.

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## Minnesota Phosphorus Lawn Fertilizer Law – January 1, 2004

Fertilizers containing phosphorus cannot be used on lawns in the seven county Twin Cities metro area (Anoka, Caver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington).

Outside the seven county Twin Cities metro area, lawn fertilizer use is limited to 3% phosphate content.

**Exceptions:** Lawn fertilizer with higher phosphorus content than stated above can be used when:

- Establishing new lawns by seeding or laying sod.
- When soil testing shows need for phosphorus fertilization.

For soil testing information, contact the UM Soil Test Lab at 612-625-3101 or visit them at the “Yard and Garden” section at [www.extension.umn.edu](http://www.extension.umn.edu).

**Look for the middle number!** A string of three numbers on a fertilizer bag show its analysis – the middle number being phosphate (phosphorus) content. A “zero in the middle” means phosphorus-free fertilizer.

