



Antioch enacts ban to aid lakes

No fertilizers with phosphorus allowed

By Corrinne Hess | Daily Herald Staff

Published: 10/18/2007 12:13 AM

Concern over lake pollution has prompted Antioch to be the first community in the state to ban lawn fertilizers containing phosphorus.

Environmentalists are cheering village board passage of the ban Monday, saying the nutrient flows into lakes and causes excessive growth of algae.

"Antioch is blessed with a number of beautiful lakes, and this ordinance will help keep those waters clean for the future, even as the village grows," said Cynthia Skrukud, clean water advocate for the Illinois Sierra Club.

Phosphorus encourages plant growth, which is good for the grass but not for the water it washes into.

The nutrient also fuels algae growth, often to the point where algae sucks oxygen out of the water, killing fish and other aquatic life, Skrukud said.

Stacy James, a water resources scientist with the Prairie Rivers Network in Champaign, said she hopes other communities follow.

"Antioch should be applauded for its progressiveness," James said. "Normally phosphorus is a good thing, but if you've ever seen an algae-infested water body, it is an eyesore. It really hurts bodies of water."

Sherry Smith, a horticulturist with Horvat Nurseries and Garden Center in Lindenhurst, said she doesn't think the ban will last.

"There is so little phosphorus in a bag of fertilizer, that compared to other things, it really doesn't cause that big of a problem," Smith said.

The amount of phosphorus can be determined by looking at the middle number on a fertilizer bag. For example, "10-3-10" means the blend contains 10 percent nitrogen, 3 percent phosphorus, and 10 percent potash.

Smith said all fertilizers on the market contain at least some trace of phosphorus.

Antioch Mayor Dorothy Larson disagreed, saying some Wisconsin stores sell phosphorus-free fertilizers.

"We've talked to Menards and Wal-Mart, and they can get it on the shelves, at about the same price per square foot as other fertilizers," she said.

According to the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, many soils already contain sufficient quantities of phosphorus to support healthy lawns.

Minnesota instituted a statewide ban on phosphorus in fertilizer in 2005; Twin Lakes, Wis., has banned the nutrient since 2002.

Wednesday, Twin Lakes officials said there has been a noticeable improvement in water quality since the ban.

Skrukud said with signs of phosphorus overload already showing in Lake Marie and the Chain O' Lakes, she is happy Antioch acted before the problem escalated.

Larson said that during discussions with the Sierra Club about the village's new sewage treatment plant, the group asked officials to consider the ban.

"The more we looked at it, the more we saw this as a win-win situation for us," she said. "Our soils are already phosphorus-rich. This is the right thing to do, and better for the environment."

Phosphorus file

What is it: Nutrient that encourages plant growth.

Found in: Fertilizers, household cleaning products, animal and human waste.

Problem: When phosphorus gets into rivers and lakes, it fuels algae growth in water, which sucks out oxygen needed by fish and other aquatic life.

Banned from fertilizers in: State of Minnesota and some Wisconsin communities, including Twin Lakes.

Source: Sierra Club, Illinois Chapter