

ARTICLE XXXII. - FERTILIZER AND LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

Sec. 54-1020. - Findings of fact.

As a result of impairment to Sarasota County waters caused by excessive nutrients under the Florida Impaired Waters Rule, and the imminent start of the rainy season, which is expected to be heavier than normal, the Sarasota County Board of County Commissioners has determined that the lands and waters of Sarasota County are at particularly high risk for adverse effects to surface and groundwater. More restrictive measures than are otherwise required by the "Florida Green Industries Best Management Practices for Protection of Water Resources in Florida, June 2002," as revised, shall be required by this Ordinance No. 2007-062.

(Ord. No. 2007-053, 4-30-2007; Ord. No. 2007-062, § 2, 8-27-2007)

Sec. 54-1021. - Short title.

This Article is referred to as the "Sarasota County Fertilizer and Landscape Management Code."

(Ord. No. 2007-053, 4-30-2007; Ord. No. 2007-062, § 3, 8-27-2007)

Sec. 54-1022. - Purpose and intent.

This Article regulates the proper use of Fertilizers by any Applicator and requiring proper training of Commercial and Institutional Fertilizer Applicators and by establishing a Restricted Season, fertilizer content and application rates, fertilizer-free zones, low maintenance zones, exemptions, training and licensing requirements. The Ordinance requires the use of Best Management Practices which provide specific management guidelines to minimize negative secondary and cumulative environmental effects associated with the misuse of Fertilizers. These secondary and cumulative effects have been observed in and on Sarasota County's natural and artificial stormwater and drainage conveyances, lakes, canals, estuaries, interior freshwater wetlands, the Myakka River and nearshore waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Collectively, these waterbodies are an asset critical to the environmental, recreational, cultural and economic well-being of Sarasota County residents and the health of the public. Overgrowth of algae and vegetation hinder the effectiveness of flood attenuation provided by natural and artificial stormwater and drainage conveyances. Recent red tide blooms, accumulation of red drift algae on local beaches, heighten community concerns about water quality and eutrophication of surrounding waters. Regulation of nutrients, including both phosphorus and nitrogen contained in Fertilizer, will help improve and maintain water and habitat quality.

(Ord. No. 2007-053, 4-30-2007; Ord. No. 2007-062, § 4, 8-27-2007)

Sec. 54-1023. - Definitions.

For this article, the following terms shall have the meanings set forth in this section unless the context clearly indicates otherwise.

Administrator means the Sarasota County Administrator, or an administrative official of Sarasota County government designated by the County Administrator to administer and enforce the provisions of this article.

Application or Apply means the actual physical deposit of Fertilizer to Turf or Landscape Plants.

Applicator means any Person who applies Fertilizer on Turf and/or Landscape Plants in Sarasota County.

Article means Chapter 54, Article XXXII, of the Sarasota County Code of Ordinances, as amended, unless otherwise specified.

Board means the Board of County Commissioners of Sarasota County, Florida.

Best Management Practices means turf and landscape practices which minimize the negative environmental impacts of installation and maintenance of landscapes.

Code Enforcement Officer, Official, or Inspector means any designated employee or agent of Sarasota County whose duty it is to enforce codes and ordinances enacted by Sarasota County.

Commercial Fertilizer Applicator means any Person who applies Fertilizer on Turf and/or Landscape Plants in Sarasota County in exchange for money, goods, services or other valuable consideration.

Fertilize, Fertilizing, or Fertilization means the act of applying Fertilizer to Turf, specialized Turf, or Landscape Plant.

Fertilizer means any substance or mixture of substances, including pesticide/fertilizer mixtures such as "weed and feed" products, that contains one or more recognized plant nutrients and promotes plant growth, or controls soil acidity or alkalinity, or provides other soil enrichment, or provides other corrective measures to the soil.

Guaranteed Analysis means the percentage of plant nutrients or measures of neutralizing capability claimed to be present in a Fertilizer.

Institutional Applicator means any Person, other than a noncommercial or commercial Applicator (unless such definitions also apply under the circumstances), that applies Fertilizer for the purpose of maintaining Turf and/or Landscape Plants. Institutional Applicators shall include, but shall not be limited to, owners and managers of public lands, schools, parks, religious institutions, utilities, industrial or business sites and any residential properties maintained in condominium and/or common ownership.

Landscape Plant means any native or exotic tree, shrub, or groundcover (excluding Turf).

Low Maintenance Zone means an area a minimum of six feet wide adjacent to watercourses which is planted and managed in order to minimize the need for fertilization, watering, mowing, etc.

Pasture means land used for livestock grazing that is managed to provide feed value.

Person means any natural Person, business, corporation, limited liability company, partnership, limited partnership, association, club, organization, and/or any group of people acting as an organized entity.

Restricted Season means June 1 through September 30.

Sarasota County Approved Best Management Practices Training Program means a training program approved by the Sarasota County Administrator that includes at a minimum, the most current version of the "Florida Green Industries Best Management Practices for Protection of Water Resources in Florida, June 2002," as revised and the more stringent requirements set forth in this article.

Slow Release, Controlled Release, Timed Release, Slowly Available, or Water Insoluble Nitrogen means nitrogen in a form which delays its availability for plant uptake and use after application, or which extends its availability to the plant longer than a reference rapid or quick release product.

Specialized Turf Manager means a Person responsible for Fertilizing or directing the Fertilization of a golf course or publicly owned athletic field.

Turf, Sod, or Lawn means a piece of grass-covered soil held together by the roots of the grass.

(Ord. No. 2007-053, 4-30-2007; Ord. No. 2007-062, § 5, 8-27-2007)

Sec. 54-1024. - Applicability.

This article shall be applicable to and shall regulate any and all Applicators of Fertilizer and areas of application of Fertilizer within the unincorporated area of Sarasota County, unless such Applicator is specifically exempted by the terms of this article from the regulatory provisions of this article. Municipalities may elect to make this article applicable within their own jurisdictions. This article shall be prospective only, and shall not impair any existing contracts.

(Ord. No. 2007-053, 4-30-2007; Ord. No. 2007-062, § 6, 8-27-2007)

Sec. 54-1025. - Timing of application.

No Applicator shall Apply Fertilizers containing nitrogen and/or phosphorus to Turf and/or Landscape Plants during the Restricted Season.

(Ord. No. 2007-062, § 7, 8-27-2007)

Sec. 54-1026. - Fertilizer content and application rate.

- (a) No phosphorus Fertilizer shall be Applied to Turf and/or Landscape Plants within Sarasota County at application rates which exceed 0.25 lbs. P₂O₅/1,000 ft² per application nor exceed 0.50 lbs. P₂O₅/1,000 ft² per year.
 - (b) Fertilizers Applied to Turf and/or Landscape Plants within Sarasota County shall contain no less than 50 percent Slow Release Nitrogen per Guaranteed Analysis Label.
 - (c) Fertilizers should be applied to Turf and/or Landscape Plants at the lowest rate necessary. No more than four pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet shall be applied to any Turf/landscape area in any calendar year.
- (Ord. No. 2007-062, § 8, 8-27-2007)

Sec. 54-1027. - Impervious surface.

Fertilizer shall not be applied, spilled, or otherwise deposited on any impervious surfaces. Any Fertilizer applied, spilled, or deposited, either intentionally or accidentally, on any impervious surface shall be immediately and completely removed to the greatest extent practicable. Fertilizer released on an impervious surface must be immediately contained and either legally applied to Turf or any other legal site, or returned to the original or other appropriate container. In no case shall Fertilizer be washed, swept, or blown off impervious surfaces into stormwater drains, ditches, conveyances, or water bodies.

(Ord. No. 2007-062, § 9, 8-27-2007)

Sec. 54-1028. - Fertilizer-free zones.

Fertilizer shall not be applied within ten feet of any pond, stream, watercourse, lake or canal or in any designated wetland or within ten feet of any wetland as defined by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (Chapter 62-340, Florida Administrative Code) or from the top of a seawall. If more stringent Sarasota County Code regulations apply, this provision does not relieve the requirement to adhere to the more stringent regulations. Newly planted Turf and/or Landscape Plants may be fertilized in this Zone only for the first 60-day establishment period.

(Ord. No. 2007-062, § 10, 8-27-2007)

Sec. 54-1029. - Low maintenance zone.

A voluntary six-foot low maintenance zone is strongly recommended, but not mandated, from any pond, stream, watercourse, lake or canal or any designated wetland or from the top of a seawall. If more stringent Sarasota County Code regulations apply, this provision does not relieve the requirement to adhere to the more stringent regulations. No vegetative material shall be deposited or left remaining in this zone or water. Care should be taken to prevent the over-spray of aquatic weed products in this zone.

(Ord. No. 2007-062, § 11, 8-27-2007)

Sec. 54-1030. - Mode of application.

Spreader deflector shields are required when Fertilizing via broadcast spreaders. Deflectors must be positioned such that Fertilizer granules are deflected away from all impervious surfaces, fertilizer-free zones and water bodies, including wetlands.

(Ord. No. 2007-062, § 12, 8-27-2007)

Sec. 54-1031. - Management of grass clippings and vegetative material.

In no case shall grass clippings, vegetative material, and/or vegetative debris either intentionally or accidentally, be washed, swept, or blown off into stormwater drains, ditches, conveyances, water bodies, or roadways.

(Ord. No. 2007-062, § 13, 8-27-2007)

Sec. 54-1032. - Exemptions.

The provisions set forth above in Sections 54-1025 through 54-1031 of this article shall not apply to:

- (a) Golf courses. For all golf courses, the provisions of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) document, "BMPs for the Enhancement of Environmental Quality on Florida Golf Courses, January 2007," as updated, shall be followed when applying Fertilizer to golf courses. All other Specialized Turf Managers shall use their best professional judgment to apply the concepts and principles embodied in the "Florida Green Industries Best Management Practices for Protection of Water Resources in Florida, June 2002" while maintaining the health and function of their Turf and Landscape Plants.
- (b) Bona fide farm operations as defined in the Florida Right to Farm Act, F.S. § 823.14.
- (c) The provisions set forth above in Section 54-1026(b) of this article shall not apply to other properties not subject to or covered under the Florida Right to Farm Act that have Pastures used for grazing livestock.
- (d) The provisions set forth above in Sections 54-1025 and 54-1026 of this article shall not apply to newly established Turf and/or Landscape Plants for the first 60-day period after installation.

(Ord. No. 2007-053, 4-30-2007; Ord. No. 2007-062, § 14, 8-27-2007)

Sec. 54-1033. - Training.

- (a) All Applicators of Fertilizer within the unincorporated area of Sarasota County, other than private homeowners on their own property, shall abide by and successfully complete a Sarasota County approved Best Management Practices training program. This training shall include the most current

version of the "Florida Green Industries Best Management Practices for Protection of Water Resources in Florida, June 2002," as revised and shall include the more stringent requirements set forth in Sections 54-1025 through 54-1032 of this article. Upon successful completion, a Certificate of Completion will be provided. A list of approved training programs shall be maintained by Sarasota County on the Sarasota County Fertilizer Management website.

- (b) A vehicle decal shall be affixed and maintained on the exterior of all vehicles and trailers used in connection with the application of Fertilizer within the area regulated by this article. The vehicle and trailer decals shall be provided by Sarasota County.
- (c) Private homeowners are encouraged to utilize the recommendations of the University of Florida IFAS "Florida Yards and Neighborhoods" program.

(Ord. No. 2007-062, § 15, 8-27-2007)

Sec. 54-1034. - Licensing of commercial applicators.

- (a) In addition to any current or future training or education requirements mandated by the State of Florida and/or Sarasota County, all Commercial Fertilizer Applicators shall obtain a Certificate of Completion from a Sarasota County approved Best Management Practices training program prior to obtaining a Sarasota County Local Business Tax Certificate for any category of occupation which may apply any Fertilizer to Turf and/or Landscape Plants. Commercial Fertilizer Applicators shall provide proof of completion of an approved training program to the Sarasota County Tax Collector's office within 180 days of the effective date of this ordinance.
- (b) All Commercial Fertilizer Applicators applying for a new or holding an existing Local Business Tax Certificate shall ensure that all Applicators employed under the Tax Certificate receive the necessary training in accordance with section 54-1033 of this article and abide by all provisions of this article. All new employees serving as Applicators shall receive the necessary training in accordance with section 54-1033 of this article within 90 days of employment and during this 90-day period shall work under the physical supervision of an applicator who has successfully completed a Sarasota County approved Best Management Practices training program.

(Ord. No. 2007-053, 4-30-2007; Ord. No. 2007-062, § 16, 8-27-2007)

Sec. 54-1035. - Enforcement and penalty.

It is the intent hereof that the administrative, civil, and criminal penalties imposed through execution of this article be of such amount as to ensure immediate and continued compliance with this article.

- (a) Sarasota County has the authority to enforce any provision of this article per Chapter 2, Article VIII, of the Sarasota County Code of Ordinances and per provisions of F.S. ch. 162. Each day of any such violation shall constitute a separate and distinct offense.

(b)

The Code Enforcement Officer or designated inspectors shall be authorized and empowered to make inspections at reasonable hours of all land uses or activities regulated by this article in order to insure compliance with the provisions of this article. The Code Enforcement Officer or designated inspector shall make all observations during their inspections from areas accessible by the public, unless specific permission is granted by a property owner to come on their property, or a search warrant is obtained from a court of competent jurisdiction.

- (c) The Code Enforcement Officer may require corrective actions as a result of the violation activities.
- (d) A Code Enforcement Officer is authorized to issue a Citation to a Person when, based upon personal investigation, the Officer has reasonable cause to believe that the Person has violated this article. Prior to issuing a Citation, a Code Enforcement Officer may provide a Warning Notice to the Person. The Warning Notice shall specify that the Person has committed a violation of this article and must correct the violation immediately. If, upon personal investigation, a Code Enforcement Officer finds that the Person has not corrected the violation, the Code Enforcement Officer shall issue a Citation to the Person who has committed the violation. If the Person has been previously issued a Warning Notice or Citation for the same prohibited activity, the Code Enforcement Officer may immediately issue a Citation.
- (e) After issuing a Citation to an alleged violator, the Code Enforcement Officer shall deposit the original Citation and one copy of the Citation with the Clerk of the Court.
- (f) The Person issued the Citation may contest the Citation by contacting the Clerk of the Court within 30 calendar days of the Citation date and requesting a hearing. The Clerk shall then schedule a hearing in the County Court and shall provide written notice of the hearing to the Person and to the Code Enforcement Officer.
- (g) If the Person issued the Citation elects not to contest the Citation, the person shall pay the applicable civil penalty to the Clerk of the Court within 30 days after issuance of the Citation.
- (h) If the Person issued the Citation neither pays the civil penalty within the time allowed nor requests a hearing to contest the Citation, the Person shall be deemed to have waived their right to contest the Citation and judgment may be entered against the Person for an amount up to the maximum civil penalty.
- (i) Willful refusal to sign and accept a Citation issued by a Code Enforcement Officer by the cited Person issued the Citation shall be treated as a misdemeanor of the second degree, punishable as provided by F.S. §§ 775.082 and 775.083.
- (j) The civil penalty for a civil infraction shall not exceed \$500.00 per violation.
- (k) By resolution the Board shall establish the amount of any civil penalty for a civil infraction.
- (l) Notwithstanding any other provisions of this article for enforcement or penalties, the Board may also enforce this article by actions at law or in equity for damages and injunctive relief. In the event the Board prevails in any such action, the Board shall be entitled to an award of its costs.
- (m)

The County may seek a lien on the property when the Person cited for a violation fails to pay the amount entered as a judgment.

- (n) Criminal violations of this article committed willfully, with reckless indifference, or with gross careless disregard shall be treated as a misdemeanor, and shall be prosecuted and shall be punishable as provided by general law.

(Ord. No. 2007-053, 4-30-2007; Ord. No. 2007-062, § 17, 8-27-2007)

Sec. 54-1036. - Codification.

This article shall be deemed an amendment to the Sarasota County Code of Ordinances.

(Ord. No. 2007-053, 4-30-2007; Ord. No. 2007-062, § 18, 8-27-2007)

Sec. 54-1037. - Severability Clause.

If any section, subsection, sentence, clause, phrase or word of this article is for any reason, held or declared to be unconstitutional, inoperative, or void, such holding of invalidity shall not affect the remaining portions of this article; and it shall be construed to have been the intent to adopt this article without such unconstitutional, invalid, or inoperative part therein; and the remainder of this article, after the exclusion of such part or parts, shall be deemed to be held valid as if such part or parts had not been included herein.

(Ord. No. 2007-053, 4-30-2007; Ord. No. 2007-062, § 19, 8-27-2007)

Sec. 54-1038. - Effective date.

This article shall be effective immediately upon filing with the Office of the Secretary of State of Florida. However, a 180-day implementation period is hereby established in order to accomplish the following:

- (a) The establishment of a Sarasota County approved list of Best Management Practices training programs.
- (b) For Commercial Fertilizer Applicators, Institutional Applicators and other users and Applicators of Fertilizer as set forth in this article to become familiar with the provisions of this article, provide a reasonable period for compliance with the terms of this article.

No Citations, Notices to Appear, Code Enforcement Notice of Violations or other enforcement procedures shall be instituted until a 180-day implementation period has passed; however, Warning Notices may be issued during the implementation period.

(Ord. No. 2007-053, 4-30-2007; Ord. No. 2007-062, § 20, 8-27-2007)

Secs. 54-1039, 54-1040. - Reserved.

