

## County strengthens fertilizer ban

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**INDIAN RIVER COUNTY** – The county's new fertilizer-control ordinance is expected to go into effect by October, subjecting private and commercial users the same way and banning any fertilizing during the summer rainy season.

And it would be enforced by a new educator-enforcer yet to be hired.

"I think everyone has to be ecstatic," County Commissioner Peter O'Bryan said Wednesday.

At least, he said, among residents who supported the stricter ordinance Tuesday in a lengthy public hearing. The measure drew opposition from others, mostly connected to the landscape and turf-grass industry.

Nutrient pollution, such as fertilizer runoff from yards along the Indian River Lagoon and the canals that flow into it, has been linked to algae blooms clouding the water, blocking sunlight and killing acres of sea grasses.

In a 5-0 vote Tuesday, commissioners upheld three regulations they first announced last month:

- A 10-foot buffer zone between any fertilizer application and the lagoon.

- A prohibition on the use of phosphorus without a soil test.

- A requirement that at least 50 percent of all fertilizer used contain slow-release nitrogen.

This time, they rejected Commissioner Wesley Davis' proposal to exempt commercial users from the new limits if they complete a six-hour course, Best Management Practices, from the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.

"I guess I just have more confidence in the BMPs than the average person," Davis said Wednesday.

Last week, he said those who get educated in proper fertilizer use would "do the right thing." But Tuesday some speakers called that view naive.

"So I guess if I take a course in safe driving, I

don't have to obey speed limits," Vero Beach resident Diane Morgan said.

Later, O'Bryan won a 3-2 vote on his motion to ban fertilizing from June 1 through Sept. 30, the traditional rainy season, and before any major storm the rest of the year.

O'Bryan won support from Chairman Joe Flescher and Commissioner Tim Zorc. Davis and Commissioner Bob Solari dissented.

Cris Costello, a Sarasota-based regional representative from the Sierra Club, said the summer ban is needed because fertilizer runs off during Florida's sudden downpours.

Pete Snyder, the Lakeland-based executive director of the Florida Turf Grass Association, said a fertilized lawn will have strong enough roots to absorb nutrients. A lawn not being fertilized would grow weak and allow the nutrients to run off.

"One underlying thing came out," O'Bryan said. "If we're going to make an error, we should err in favor of the lagoon."

### IN RELATED ACTION

Commissioners also agreed:

- To give the public a 30-day notice of the fertilizer ordinance going into effect. That 30-day period would start counting down in about two weeks when County Attorney Dylan Reingold posts a thumbnail guide to the ordinance on the county's website, [www.ircgov.com](http://www.ircgov.com).
- To enforce the provisions as code violations, with fines up to \$500, and hire a new educator/enforcer within the Public Works Department.

