

GREENACRES

New fertilizer rules get first OK

Regulations designed to improve quality of 'impaired' waterways.

By Willie Howard

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Residents and professional landscapers will have to abide by rules for applying fertilizer under an ordinance the city council approved on first reading Monday.

Rules governing the application of fertilizer are intended to improve water quality in canals that drain the city, including the West Palm Beach Canal, a drainage artery also known as the C-51 Canal.

Fertilizer in water can feed algae blooms and accelerate the growth of aquatic weeds.

Rules for fertilizer application in the ordinance include:

■ Refraining from applying fertilizer on lawns or plants

during a flood watch or warning, a hurricane watch or warning or a tropical storm watch or warning – or when heavy rain is likely.

■ No application of fertilizer to water-saturated soil, before installing sod or within 30 days after laying sod.

■ Fertilizer cannot be applied in "fertilizer free zones" within 10 feet of any pond, stream, lake, canal, wetland or other body of water.

■ Landscapers and other commercial users of fertilizer must complete a six-hour Florida Friendly training program by the end of 2013.

The rule also forbids the intentional sweeping of grass clippings and other vegetation into storm drains, sidewalks or roads.

Those who violate the ordinance can face fines of \$250 per day or up to \$500 per day for repeat violations.

Enforcement will begin with courtesy notices, said Michael Grimm, the city's chief building official.

"We're big on educating people first," Grimm said.

The Florida Friendly fertilizer ordinance is based on a model ordinance developed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. It's intended to improve water quality in waterways designated as "impaired" because of excess nutrients.

Sections of the C-51 Canal, which carries water east along Southern Boulevard and empties into the Lake Worth Lagoon, and the E-4 Canal, which flows south from the C-51 Canal into Lake Osborne, are designated as impaired.

If approved on second reading Dec. 3, the ordinance would take effect Dec. 8.

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