

**PUTNAM VALLEY
CENTRAL SCHOOL
DISTRICT
PUTNAM VALLEY, NY**

**MS4PY2 STORMWATER
PROGRAM**

**NEWSLETTER # 1
JANUARY 2012**

**PROTECTING YOUR
WATERSHED: JANUARY 1,
2012 PHOSPHORUS LAW**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT
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1. The New Phosphorus Law

On January 1, 2012, the new phosphorus law, under NYS ECL Article 17, Title 21, took effect. The new law:

- Prohibits the use of fertilizer containing phosphorus on non-agricultural lawns and turf, except where a new lawn is being established or where a soil test indicates the need for additional phosphorus
- Phosphorus fertilizer, under the new law, means any fertilizer which includes available phosphate (P205) content greater than 0.67 percent by weight, excluding compost.
- Prohibits the application of any fertilizer for non-farm use between December 1st and April 1st
- Restricts the application of any fertilizer within 20 feet of a water body or on paved surfaces, including parking lots, roadways and sidewalks
- Requires retailers to display phosphorus-containing fertilizer separately from non-phosphorus fertilizers and post an educational sign where the phosphorus fertilizer is displayed

2. Primary Sources of Phosphorus

Most soils contain sufficient phosphorus to support turf and grass growth. Lawn fertilizers account for up to 50% of soluble phosphorus in stormwater runoff. Phosphorus is released to the soils, when excessive amounts, not utilized by grasses in lawns, are leached into the stormwater runoff. Other sources of phosphorus include:

- Defective septic systems
- Dishwashing detergents released to septic systems
- Decomposing grass and leaves
- Animal waste

- Building floor cleaners and detergents
- Car washing detergents

3. The Problem of Phosphorus

Phosphorus impacts our water, chiefly by stimulating algae growth. It has been reported that 1 pound of phosphorus can trigger 114 pounds of algae blooms. As the algae die and sink to the bottom of a water body, they become a food source for bacteria that consume oxygen. As the bacteria multiply, they deplete the oxygen in the water and create anaerobic (oxygen free) conditions, thereby causing fish kills, odors and other detrimental water quality impacts. Limiting phosphorus-containing products, will not only protect our water bodies, but save, it has been reported, \$1 to \$20 per pound in the cost for the removal of phosphorus at wastewater treatment plants.

4. The Protection of Water Bodies

The new law states that no fertilizers may be applied within twenty (20) feet of surface water except where:

- A minimum of ten (10) foot wide natural vegetative buffer exists, such as trees and shrubs
- The fertilizer is applied utilizing a spreader guard/deflector shield or drop spreader three (3) feet from the water

5. Phosphorus Soil Testing

Soil testing can be done by a laboratory or by a do-it-yourself test kit. Laboratories can be found through the local Cornell University Cooperative Extension Office. Tests run from \$10 through \$20 (2010). Soil test kits are readily available at lawn and garden and hardware stores. For further information on soil tests, contact the local Cornell University Cooperative Extension Office.

6. Reading Fertilizer Labels

Fertilizer labels have three (3) bold numbers. The first number is the amount of nitrogen (N), the second is the amount of phosphorus oxide (P2O5) and the third number is the amount of potassium oxide (K2O). A bag of 10-5-10 fertilizer contains 10 percent of nitrogen, 5 percent phosphorus oxide and 10 percent potassium oxide. The law limits the amount of P2O5 to less than 0.67% by weight. Hence, this bag of fertilizer would exceed the limits of phosphorus under the new law.

7. How Can You Help?

While the administrative portion of the program has been initiated by your District, public participation/involvement is vital to the success of this program. You can help by:

- Speaking to your neighbors and community leaders about the new law
- Contacting NYSDEC if you need an interpretation of the new law
- Carefully reading all labels when using dish washing, car washing or floor cleaners, to ensure the products you are using are free of phosphorus
- Check your lawn service as to what fertilizer they use and be sure to restrict the use of phosphorus on your lawns