



Managing nutrients on public lands

An urban nutrient management plan determines the amount, placement, timing and application of fertilizer — or other materials containing plant nutrients — in order to reduce nutrient loss to the environment and to produce quality turf and landscape plants.

Nutrient management is one solution to the nutrient pollution problem that causes algae overgrowth and “dead zones” in many waterways, including the Chesapeake Bay.

Urban nutrient management plans are site-specific and begin with a soil test from an approved lab. The soil test provides agronomic and environmentally sound recommendations for applying nutrients to turfgrass. Although most plans are developed on a voluntary basis, there are situations where developing and following an urban nutrient management plan is mandatory.

The regulations that govern the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation’s Nutrient Management Program are incorporated into several pieces of state code and permit requirements. Nutrient management plans are mandatory for the following urban lands.

- All golf courses by 2017
- All Virginia state-owned lands
- All publicly owned land that is fertilized, more than one acre and within a Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit area

Who’s responsible

Publicly owned land is typically maintained by locality grounds maintenance staff or other turfgrass professionals, but an organization that leases or has an agreement to use public space, particularly athletic fields, may also be responsible for some aspect of maintenance. If an organization is expected or allowed to fertilize a public area, it must do so according to a nutrient management plan.

Fertilization of athletic fields (especially with nitrogen) may be necessary to help trafficked turf recover and keep the playing surface safe for future uses.

How to obtain a plan

Nutrient management plans must be written by certified planners. Planners know the regulations and will help you navigate what is allowed and what is not. If you need a plan, check out DCR’s online planner directory and look for a planner certified in the turf and landscape (T&L) category. DCR manages the certification program.

Reminders

Nutrient management plans are mandatory in some situations and are subject to verification or “ground truthing.” Because of this, all fertilization records should be kept and provided to your planner if requested. Each plan should have blank record sheets so that you can log your applications. If your plan doesn’t have blank sheets, ask your planner to provide some.

Plans are typically valid for three to five years. Work with your planner and keep your plan current by having it revised before the expiration date.

