

Certain commercial fertilizers affect air quality

By Georgina Nipshagen
The Environmental Impact
of Fertilizer

Synthetic nitrogen and phosphate type commercial fertilizers affect air quality most closely associated with health problems and pollution.

Nitrates in nitrate forms of nitrogen fertilizer are not all absorbed by the soil and plants. Under normal agricultural conditions, 15 to 20 per cent of the nitrates can oxidize into the atmosphere (Parker Pratt - The Nitrate of Effluents from Irrigated Land; Riverside, California; 1979). Nitrates reaching the stratosphere can damage the ozone layer which filters potentially dangerous ultraviolet rays before they can reach the earth's surface. Emissions of fluorides and particulates during the manufacturing process of phosphate fertilizers can also contribute to air pollution.

Soil is contaminated by salt and impurities contained in synthetic fertilizers where runoff is a problem, i.e. fertilizer applied to lawns on a slope are emptied into a nearby stream to contaminate water sources far from the original application.



Eutrophication is the natural aging process that bodies of water undergo. When excessive nutrients are added to lakes, as in runoffs, the algae multiply in dizzying amounts. Their subsequent death and decomposition utilizes oxygen from the water, creating an imbalance, which in turn causes fish to suffocate. Accelerated eutrophication also makes water more difficult to treat for drinking.

Research shows that highly soluble nitrogen fertilizers contaminate underground sources of water to be pumped up by well pumps.

Commercial fertilizers are no longer being used routinely in home gardens. Many people feel that vegetables, fruit and ornamentals grown in soil containing large amounts of organic matter

are healthier. Consequently, they use organic soil additives. The new goal for the home gardener is to maintain soil quality over a long period. Utilization of large amounts of nitrogen is being questioned. Compost, manure, seaweed, bonemeal and fish emulsion are some of the alternatives which provide nutrients in a slower, steadier dosage, improving soil structure and also supplying micronutrients that plants require for healthy functioning.

It seems probable that the lush vegetative growth which nitrogen stimulates is more susceptible to pest injury, disease and cold and may actually be responsible for some plant growth problems as well as damaging to the environment.

Landscapes are being planned from an ecological perspective,

with "what is good for the earth" at the core of the planning - easier more efficient maintenance without benefit of chemical pollutants. More attention is given to growing plant varieties with natural built-in resistance to pests and diseases.

In small areas not subject to heavy foot traffic, lawns can be replaced with low-growing ground covers which have little or no fertilizer requirements such as creeping thyme, woolly yarrow or cunningham mint.

On hilly slopes, low walls interplanted with perennials and shrubs will slow down runoff. This garden technique known as terracing holds the soil together during winter and spring and is effective

in controlling erosion.

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EAGLE involves Ombudsman's office

By BEN DUMMETT
The Herald

The Ombudsman's Office of Ontario is set to investigate the province's Ministry of Natural Resources, (MNR), and the Ministry of Environment, (MOE), in connection with the quarry operations of United Aggregates Limited on Lots 21 and 22 and Concession 4 in Halton Hills, according to a letter sent by the ombudsman's office to the local environmental group Ecology Awareness Group - Landscape and Environment (EAGLE).

The letter, which is signed by Nancy Parker, an Ombudsman investigator, states "we have notified the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ministry of Environment of our intention to investigate (EAGLE's) concerns."

Andrew MacDonald, a lawyer with the legal services branch of the MNR, confirmed that the Ombudsman's office has informed the ministry that it will be carrying out an investigation. The Ombudsman's office has requested

that the MNR gets its view of EAGLE's concerns, confirmed Mr. MacDonald.

Kal Haniff, the executive assistant to the Deputy Minister of the MOE, also confirmed that his ministry has been notified about the investigation.

Neither would comment on their respective ministry's responses to the Ombudsman's office.

According to the letter sent to the MOE, the investigation will centre on EAGLE's "dissatisfaction with the delay by the Ministry of Environment in addressing the member's (EAGLE's) environmental concerns and their request for designation of the expansion of the United Aggregates Limited quarry operations under the Environment Assessment Act.

The letter to the MNR states the investigation will focus on EAGLE's "dissatisfaction with the Ministry of Natural Resources' decision to not put conditions on the license of United Aggregates Limited restricting expansion of its quarry operations until en-

vironmental concerns and procedures have been addressed.

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