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## **'Yard-scapers' hope to slow the spread of lawn chemicals The public-private group says that lush, green lawns can pose risks to people and the environment.**

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AUGUSTA - A group of Maine "yard-scapers" is trying to convince people they don't need to put so much fertilizer and pesticide on their lawns.

Gary Fish, manager of pesticide programs for the Maine Board of Pesticides Control, said more than 6.2 million pounds of yard-care pesticides were brought into Maine in 2007. This number has increased sevenfold since 1995 and coincides with an explosion in the number of yard-care companies in the state.

"Maine YardScaping is a partnership," Fish said. "It's public and private and grew out of an earlier collaboration with the Friends of Casco Bay. At the time we called it BayScaping. When that became a statewide effort, it became YardScaping."

Fish, who coordinates the program, said the group's main mission is to get people to "lower the bar on perfection."

He said too many people want to have the perfect lawn. But they can do that, he said, without an excessive amount of chemicals.

"They're spending a lot of money on things they don't need," he said. "If you look at the most recent recommendation from Cornell University and the University of Connecticut, most people are overdoing it.

"We're trying to convince them, through positive measures, that it's better all around for them, for their children, their pets and the environment, if they cut back. And hopefully they'll get to the point that they don't put anything on at all."

At the Maine YardScaping Partnership website, property owners can order a YardScape sign for their lawns to show they have pledged to reduce reliance on pesticides and fertilizers.

According to research done by Cornell University's Breast Cancer and Environmental Risk Factors program, active ingredients in turf pesticide products cause cancer.

The products also contain other ingredients not listed on the product label that may be hazardous to people and the environment. Federal law does not require the names of inert ingredients be listed.

Barbara Welch, lake biologist with the state Department of Environmental Protection, said turf experts and scientists have sampled Maine soils and found they are rich in phosphorus.

"Of all the samples sent to the lab in the last five years, 80 percent of them did not need phosphorus to grow grass," she said.

"They don't need the nitrogen either. Nitrogen (from fertilizer) is washing off and causing algae blooms and red tide, and phosphorus (from fertilizer) is causing problems in lakes and streams."

Phosphorus also causes algae blooms and excessive weed growth, she said. Welch said state legislators passed a law two years ago that required retailers to post signs explaining when it is appropriate to use fertilizer so people don't overfeed phosphorous to their lawns.