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Manitoba bans high-phosphate dishwasher soap

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Manitoba is cleaning up its soap for the sake of the environment.

Water Stewardship Minister Christine Melnick introduced long-expected legislation Thursday banning the sale of dishwasher soap containing more than 0.5 per cent phosphorus — the substance that feeds the blue-green algae that's choking Lake Winnipeg.

The ban takes effect in 2010, much like similar bans in states like Maryland and Michigan.

Consumers won't notice anything different on store shelves, since the makers of all the big-name brands are on board with the ban. In fact, the industry group representing major soap makers like Procter & Gamble and Unilever already has committed to a voluntary phosphates ban by 2010.

Next on Melnick's agenda is an attack on cosmetic lawn fertilizer, expected in the next few weeks.

Those new regulations are expected to ban the use of fertilizers containing phosphorus on all lawns except new turf that's short on the nutrient.

The province says most Manitoba topsoil already contains plenty of phosphorus, and the extra that's added in fertilizer just runs off lawns, into ditches and drains and ultimately into Lake Winnipeg.

The province is also eyeing phosphates in shampoo, body wash and even other kinds of household cleaners. Melnick also said the province will keep battling for a national ban on dishwasher detergent with phosphates.

Retailers who violate Manitoba's soap ban risk jail time or a \$50,000 fine, and Melnick said provincial enforcement officers will do spot checks.