

Ministry of Agriculture, Food
and Agribusiness

2nd Floor
1 Stone Road West
Guelph, Ontario N1G 4Y2
Tel: 519-826-4151

Ministère de l'Agriculture, de
l'Alimentation et de
l'Agroentreprise

2e étage
1, rue Stone ouest
Guelph (Ontario) N1G 4Y2
Tél. : 519-826-4151



**POLICY DIVISION
FOOD SAFETY & ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY BRANCH**

November 1, 2024

By E-mail Only

To: All municipalities in Ontario (Planning Department and/or Clerk's Office)

Re: Considerations for municipal by-laws governing sources of greenhouse light

Dear municipal partners,

To support the production of high-quality greenhouse crops year round in Ontario, supplemental lighting is used in greenhouse facilities to adapt to shorter days in the autumn and winter seasons and low light levels during cloudy days in the spring and summer seasons. An increase in the use of supplemental lighting in Ontario greenhouses has been accompanied by an increase in the amount of light emitted from greenhouses at night, mostly during autumn and winter months. Without proper management strategies, light emitted from greenhouses during nighttime hours can potentially be disruptive to neighbours.

Recognizing that there are regional differences, in certain parts of Ontario this may be more of an issue than in others; however, I am writing today to outline some information that may be helpful to consider if this is a topic of interest in your local community.

I would like to take this opportunity to share with you the attached publication, 'Best Management Practices: Managing Nighttime Greenhouse Light Emissions', which OMAFA recently released at the Canadian Greenhouse Conference on October 9, 2024. This document was informed by multi-year research projects completed by leading experts in this field. The purpose of this document is to assist greenhouse operators maintain successful, optimal production system conditions while minimizing the impact of nuisance light.

The *Municipal Act, 2001* enables municipalities to exercise their authority and discretion to regulate matters that, in the opinion of council, are or could become a public nuisance. For example, municipalities may adopt by-laws under the *Municipal Act, 2001*, provided they do not restrict a normal farming practice, as prescribed in the *Farming and Food Production Protection Act, 1998*. Municipalities may also consider implementing setbacks or other zoning provisions under the *Planning Act, 1990* provided all types, sizes and intensities of agricultural uses are promoted and protected in prime agricultural areas, as outlined in the [Provincial Planning Statement, 2024](#).

Municipalities should always seek their own legal advice to address all applicable legislation.

The following factors may also be important to consider if your community is contemplating drafting a by-law to address greenhouse lighting:

- **Consultation:**
 - Engaging early and often with affected parties will not only help garner support for a local approach, but learning from those involved in the agriculture sector and nearby residents builds a deeper understanding of the issue at hand.
- **Flexibility:**
 - There are several options for addressing light, some are prescriptive approaches, such as establishing a by-law and/or setbacks, whereas others are outcome based, such as education and/or compliance plans.
 - To allow greenhouses to operate efficiently while reducing the impact on neighbours, it is recommended that any language used in a by-law avoids establishing a 'zero tolerance' approach. Building on the research drawn upon for the Best Management Practices: Managing Nighttime Greenhouse Light Emissions' document, which recognizes the need to ventilate the greenhouse growing environment, it is recommended that any by-laws include specified time periods for which a specified amount of light abatement curtain gapping (e.g., up to 10% gapping) may occur. It is suggested that venting periods should occur in the early morning hours (e.g., 12am - 5am) to avoid the times of the evening when people may be outdoors and interacting with the night sky (e.g., sunset - midnight).
 - To enhance flexibility and compliance, some municipal by-laws include the option for entering into an 'Alternative Compliance Plan,' whereby the municipality works collaboratively with an individual greenhouse on establishing an achievable light reduction plan that reflects the specifics of that operation.
- **Lead time:**
 - Once an approach has been identified, municipalities should provide early notice and phase-in the effective dates to enable long-enough lead times for greenhouse operations to source the necessary material and labour to implement compliance measures.
- **Implementation:**
 - Provisions that rely on compliance thresholds which may be challenging to measure (e.g., require specialized equipment or training) should be avoided to aid in implementing by-laws in a consistent manner.
 - Depending on how a by-law is structured, municipalities may also need to consider impacts to administrative resources, such as hours for enforcement staff, and establishing mechanisms to report issues.
 - A strategy for progressive enforcement and compliance is recommended, including education and outreach to work with growers, where possible, to ensure rules are understood and met. Public engagement and

communication can help to support success. For example, by developing plain language support materials or graphics to help build knowledge about a by-law's intended outcomes.

Municipalities are encouraged to take these aspects, among others, into consideration when preparing approaches to regulating greenhouse light in their communities.

If you have general questions about approaches available under the *Municipal Act*, please get in touch with your local [Municipal Services Office](#) to speak with a Municipal Advisor at the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH).

Should you have any questions about the document Best Management Practices: Managing Nighttime Greenhouse Light Emissions, please reach out to OMAFA's Agricultural Information Contact Centre at 1-877-424-1300 or ag.info.omafra@ontario.ca. If staff want to discuss this or other agricultural land use planning matters, please reach out to the [OMAFA Rural Planner](#) covering your municipality.

I appreciate all you do to support agri-food entrepreneurship in your municipality. You are critical partners in supporting a thriving agri-food sector and rural Ontario.

Sincerely,

Andrea Martin
Director, Food Safety and Environmental Policy Branch
Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness

Encl. Best Management Practices: Managing Nighttime Greenhouse Light Emissions