



A Guest Editorial
by
DELAWARENCE G. SOUTHWICK
for Chemical
La., Indiana, Mich.
New Section Answer
to Industry Demand
for Weed, Turf

PROGRESS



In your hands

Tighter rules and regulations in the Green Industry have changed the field's landscape in more ways than one. And businesspeople in every sector of the profession are feeling the crunch.

Regulations "are more stringent than they were 10, 15 years ago, and that's the nature of the beast," said Tom Delaney, director of government affairs for the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). "Regulations are always going to increase. They're always going to be more restrictive. And that's the nature of regulating and regulators."

As dark as it sounds, new rules and regulations aren't necessarily a bad thing, said John Farner, federal affairs director for the Irrigation Association (IA). On the irrigation side, "professional contractors are putting a lot more thought into what is planted into a landscape and how that landscape is irrigated...what the design is like, and how that design is used.

"That's the most noticeable change that I've seen so far," he continued. "A lot of the contractors and manufacturers I've talked to on the irrigation side are using this as a business opportunity."

Not only that, he said, they're embracing the challenge to diversify their businesses and redefine themselves in the face of tighter municipal, state and federal mandates.

Farner said two predominant issues are driving the irrigation industry today: water quantity and water quality. Water quantity is a concern in arid states west of the Mississippi River. The West's water availability — or lack thereof — "is dictating what plant material is being installed and what kind of water is being used to irrigate the landscape," among

New regulations have made work harder for Green Industry pros, and change won't happen on its own.

other things, Farner said.

Out East, lawmakers are zeroed in on reducing runoff into the Chesapeake Bay watershed. "Look, we don't want any impurities being runoff into the Chesapeake Bay," Farner said. "Our industry is being looked at...but there's no one size fits all solution when it comes to the irrigation profession. It needs to be based on the local environment, the locality. When we're faced with one size fits all, it really doesn't work."

And Bay runoff isn't only affecting irrigators; it's also creating tighter fertilizer regulations for landscapers, who now are restricted on when they can fertilize, what kind of fertilizers they can use, and how much of them.

"We are seeing very prescriptive and restrictive local ordinances covering pesticide and fertilizer use generally, and as part of water quality concerns," said Aaron Hobbs, president of Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE). Hobbs said the Green Industry should be most concerned about "the absence of science and recognition of product benefits in such policies, and the potential for local and state enforcement targeting professionals."

Some states have cut back on fertilizing by up to several weeks, Delaney said.

And that's just the start for the landscape industry. The EPA's WaterSense program, aimed at conserving water, is "killing the turfgrass and landscape industries," Delaney asserted. "It will cut

back on the amount of turfgrass that's out there. And as they cut back on the amount of turfgrass, it has a rippling effect. The fertilizer industry will sell less fertilizer. The turfgrass companies will sell less seed."

But the debate over immigration and H-2B is shaking up the landscape business as much as anything, he said.

If landscape companies think it's expensive to participate in the program now, he said, just wait until Jan. 1, when "they're going to have to pay \$2.60 more an hour per worker," on average.

PLANET members impacted by the H-2B program can't afford to "put their head in the sand," Delaney asserted. "Some of them are afraid that if they put their name on something, they might have an inspector at the door. Otherwise, why would you not spend five minutes to get on our site and send a letter to your congressman? It takes five minutes! It's just trying to wake people up and get them to see they can have an effect and they can make a difference."

Having that dialog with lawmakers is most challenging — and most important — of all, Farner echoed.

"The number one challenge is making sure our folks are at the table when these issues are being looked at by a governing body," he said. "We need to make sure we are engaged and speaking with policy makers, a mayor, a congressman, everyone in-between. If we work with legislators, they'll respond more positively to our needs."