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42 Landscape Management, August 1992

Pacific Northwest drought catches industry by surprise

SEATTLE, Wash.—One of the most severe droughts in Pacific Northwest history is drying up the green industry.

Suffering the most are firms directly involved in new lawn and/or landscape installations, sod farms and nurseries—particularly those serving the greater Seattle market.

"There's no question we're being treated unfairly. We're being targeted because we're so visible," says Mike Bushmaker of The Highridge Corp., a landscape contractor here.

Green industry businesses absorbed the first broadside in April and May (the height of landscape selling season) when Seattle and surrounding communities urged homeowners not to install (or have installed) new lawns or landscapes. Nurseries; landscape designers, contractors and installers; sod growers; hydroseeders—all saw business fall or not materialize.

In spite of a week of unusually wet weather in early July, the drought dug in as the summer progressed. This past winter there was precious little snow to refill Cascade Mountain streams which recharge reservoirs.

No one can predict when the drought will ease. Even when it does, this summer's shortage points out the inadequacy of a water delivery system that hasn't had a substantial enlargement since 1968.

You're under arrest!—Seattle and the 28 suburbs served by the Seattle Water Department (1.2 million people) moved first to drastically reduce outdoor water use, including passing lawn watering bans monitored by water police. Those found watering their lawns face fines of $100 to $500.

Shrubs and flowers can still be watered with hoses with shutoff nozzles, or with irrigation systems if they're separate from turfed areas.

"In the long run these types of restrictions never work," says Bushmaker, who also chairs the newly formed Washington Coalition for Sensible Water Management (WCSWM). At least 10 allied green industry groups lend support to WCSWM.

(WCSWM says there are more than 3,000 landscaping, nursery and related businesses, employing about 25,000 workers in and around Seattle.)

Although WCSWM representatives met with city officials and pleaded the environmental implications of the watering ban and its economic harm to green industry businesses, water officials wouldn't compromise.

Drought a wake-up call—Rod Bailey, Evergreen Services Corp., says periodic rainfall so far this summer has been enough to keep most Seattle-area lawns alive, and maintenance/mowing firms working although at a reduced schedule.

Even so, the outdoor watering restrictions are causing landscape firms to alter their services. "We're standing on our heads doing manual watering of trees and shrubs," he says.

"Many plants have become turf-water dependent. They started into wilt as soon as the lawn's turf turned brown."

Bailey says the drought is a wake-up call to green industry professionals in the Pacific Northwest. It's telling them that they need a stronger public education effort, and have to be a part of the water-use decision-making process.

Seattle's water woes won't be solved until its system is upgraded, he explains. The burgeoning King County area has outgrown its water supply system, and the green industry is paying the price.

—Ron Hall
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Customer Service Tips

Handling customer complaints: get to the crux of the problem

by E.T. Wandtke

Unfortunately, relationships with your customers do not run smoothly all the time. As service providers, your attitude toward the customer's complaint can mean the difference between keeping a customer or losing several.

Here are some tips on how to deal with a customer complaint:

1. Discover what went wrong. This should be the time for fact-finding, not finger-pointing. During this discovery process, don't make any judgments or place any blame on the customer.

2. Discover who is responsible. This determination may take time, but it is very important to determine if an individual caused the complaint or if the cause of the complaint was outside the control of the employee or customer.

3. If you are not certain about what to do, ask!

Customer service personnel who handle telephone complaints must know how to deal with complaints a little differently:

1. Have customer service reps pretend it is their company. What would they do if they owned the company? How would they deal with complaints a little differently:

2. Give the customer time to explain the problem. Do not sound rushed. Apologize if you have to take another call. Then, when you get them back on the line, apologize for the delay and restate the problem.

3. If you are not certain about what to do, ask!

Customer service personnel should not make promises that the company might not be able to keep. They should tell the customer they do not have an immediate answer, and that the manager will return the call.

Most important of all, make sure they give the customer time to explain the problem, and that they're efficient and professional.
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**GREEN INDUSTRY EVENTS**

**AUGUST**

12: Professional Lawn Care Assn. of Mid-America Summer Field Day, Powell Gardens, Kingsville, Mo. Contact: Olivia Golden, PLCAMA, P.O. Box 35184, Kansas City, MO 64134; (816) 765-7616.

12-13: Penn State Turfgrass Field Days, Valentine Research Center, University Park. Contact: Dr. Thomas Watschke, 116 AS I Bldg., University Park, PA 16802; (814) 863-7644 or Christine King, Pa. Turfgrass Council, P.O. Box 1078, Lemont, PA 16851; (814) 863-3475.

18: Golf Course Design/Construction Field Day, SUNY, Delhi. Contact: N.Y. Turfgrass Assn., P.O. Box 612, Latham, NY 12110; (518) 783-1229.


19: University of Rhode Island Turf Field Day, Kingston. Contact: Dr. Noel Jackson or Dr. Bridget Ruemmele, Dept. of Plant Sciences, Woodward Hall, URI, Kingston, RI 02881; (401) 792-2481.

19: New Hampshire Landscape Association Twilight Meeting: Wetlands, Derry, NH. Contact: Guy Hodgdon, NHLA (800) 639-5601.

20: Michigan State University Turf Field Day, Lansing. Contact: Dr. Frank Rossi, MSU, Plant & Soil Sciences Bldg., E. Lansing, MI 48824; (517) 353-0860.

20-21: Pennsylvania Landscape & Nursery Trade Show & Conference/West, Pittsburgh Expo Mart. Contact: PLNA, 1924 N. Second St., Harrisburg, PA 17102; (717) 238-1673.

26: "Landscaping for Wildlife," Cook College/Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J. Contact: Office of Continuing Professional Education, Cook College, P.O. Box 231, New Brunswick, NJ 08903; (908) 932-9271.

**SEPTEMBER**

11-13: Florida Nursery and Allied Trades Show, Orange County Civic Center, Orlando. Contact: Joanne Chive, FNGA, 5401 Kirkman Rd., Suite 650, Orlando, FL 32819; (407) 345-8137.


15-16: University of California Turfgrass Conference and Field Day & Landscape Management Research Conference, UC Riverside. Contact: Registration Coordinator/Turf & Landscape Conferences, 4110 Batchelor Hall Extension, Botany & Plant Sciences Dept., Univ. of California, Riverside, CA 92521.

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For more information, call RISE at (202) 872-3860, or write to 1155 15th St. N.W., Suite 900, Washington, D.C. 20005.
Lightning detection system spots dangers at 25 miles

The 1992 Masters Tournament was the first in-practice testing ground for a new technology developed to detect and range lightning within 25 miles of a golf course.

The patented technology was developed by Lightning Location and Protection (LLP), which was recently purchased by the Toro Company's Irrigation Division.

The system, called the Electrical Storm Identification Device (ESID), was first put into public practice at the Masters in Augusta. Midway through the third round of Saturday's play, the sign-boards carried warnings of threatening weather nearby. About 30 minutes later, with no rain in sight and the skies uniformly overcast, the lightning sirens began to sound.

Neither the spectators nor the television commentators could understand the reason for the sirens; it seemed like just another cloudy day. But within 20 minutes, the rains came, complete with thunder and lightning.

Play was suspended with the detection of one flash of lightning, which struck 14 miles away from the course. Twenty minutes later, the big rains came and 26 flashes were seen in a span of 15 minutes.

The ESID also indicates when it is safe to resume play.

Heavy duty sweeper mounts to lighter tractor frames

Sweepster, Inc. has introduced the new Model M18 sweeper for lawn and garden tractors.

The M18 mounts to most popular lawn and garden tractors with a minimum of 10 hp. The mechanical sweeper is driven by the tractor’s front or mid-PTO, by a constant-velocity drive shaft.

Standard features include: 18-inch wide sectional brush available in polypropylene, wire or 1/2 poly-1/2 wire; manual angle change; electric brush lift and rear casters. Options include: side-mounted brush casters to prevent turf scalping during thatch removal and storage stands which mount in place of side casters.

Jim Koch, Sweepster Product Manager, says the sweeper's weight might make some question its sturdiness.

"Just because this sweeper weighs less doesn't mean it's not heavy duty," says Koch. "We've incorporated the technology from our larger brooms into the M18. The heavy-duty center gearbox was custom-designed for this special application and extensively tested to ensure a durable low maintenance driveline."

Parallel linkage mounting and rear casters allow the brush head to oscillate sideways and up and down along contours.