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Don't buy business!

A frequent complaint voiced by many CAs is that competitors are "ruthless price-cutters."

It is certainly a sad reality that a few weed, turf, and tree jobs are taken at absurdly low prices. Sometimes these low bids actually result from deliberate price slashing; sometimes the contractor has simply not used a pricing basis which covers all costs and profits.

Whatever the reason for price cutting, the end effect on the industry is unsettling. Prices are soft, profits inconstant, quality of work inconsistent.

"The only thing worse than a man who cuts prices is the man who meets them," one reader wrote us recently. This is a telling comment, and perhaps spells out the real ethical question. Since price-cutters exist in any business and crop up from time to time regardless of what is done to stop them, whether or not to meet reduced prices is a decision reputable companies are often forced to make.

Fortunately, the low-price firms either (a) cannot perform quality work and therefore get no more jobs, or (b) are eventually forced out of business because they end up broke.

But this does not solve the dilemma of a well-established, sound contract application firm which is occasionally forced to bid against such outfits. Otherwise astute managers, faced with this kind of competition, sometimes have to agree to "buy business" by price cutting because they feel a job is too important to lose.

Ideally, perhaps, the CA should just let the business go; but there are factors which sometimes make this infeasible.

We suggest that applicators everywhere work through their various trade associations, through chambers of commerce, and through a public education program (utilizing advertising) to remind customers that, in vegetation management especially, it's *quality* that is really important.