

## What to do about the "Shopper"

Contract applicators are constantly faced with the problem of giving free inspections to prospective customers who may be just shopping around for the lowest possible price. This is the bane of existence in almost every service industry.

Experts in the vegetation maintenance field take opposite stands on this question. Some feel it's a condition we have to live with; others contend CAs should charge for their surveys.

After all, the latter group asserts, it takes the time of their skilled men to properly assess the extent of damage and to prescribe recommended corrective measures. Homeowners who are simply fishing for the cheapest bid aren't really interested in quality anyway, this group feels. If potential buyers of professional services pay for an estimate, they'll have more respect for the expert analysis they receive, and CAs are compensated for having men out on what might turn out to be a wild-goose chase anyway, these industry men maintain.

Those who favor the "free inspection" say this practice is really just another cost of doing business, not too unlike the money they spend for newspaper and direct mail advertising, salesmen's commissions, etc. These CAs do not consider themselves true professionals, in the sense doctors and lawyers are. Rather they regard themselves as expert tradesmen with a specialized service to offer. They say they write more business by

offering free inspections than they do from almost any other form of sales promotion.

There are valid reasons both to support and reject the viewpoints of each group. Their differences in outlook will probably never be resolved. Yet, we can't help but wonder what the most successful contract applicators do. Do they look upon every contact with the public as an opportunity to further their sales aims and to boost their company's reputation for competence? Do they recognize that the buying public has the same right to compare the prices of one service company with those of another, just as they do when they're out looking for a new car?

Our guess is that vegetation service companies which offer free inspections are in the majority and that they just live with the "shopper". Even if the sale is lost to a lower bidder, the reputation of the loser can be strengthened if his salesmen conduct themselves to properly reflect the proficiency of the firm they represent.

WEEDS TREES AND TURF is the national monthly magazine of urban/industrial vegetation maintenance, including turf management, weed and brush control, and tree care. Readers include "contract applicators," arborists, nurserymen, and supervisory personnel with highway departments, railways, utilities, golf courses, and similar areas where vegetation must be enhanced or controlled. While the editors welcome contributions by qualified freelance writers, unsolicited manuscripts, unaccompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes, cannot be returned.

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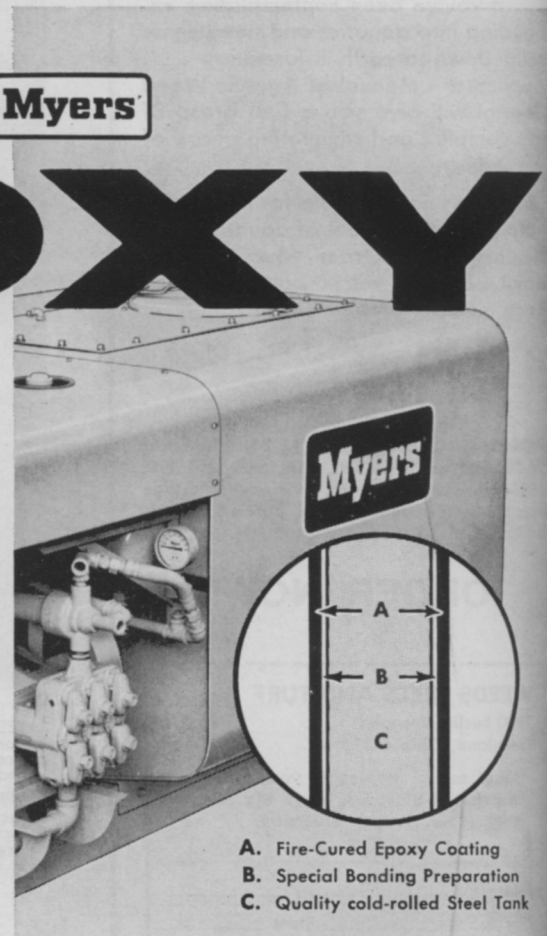
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