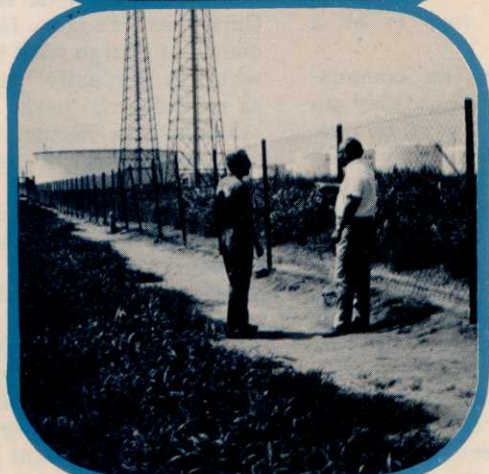


The Contract Applicator



IN COMMERCIAL TURF Carl Ripper turned to contract pesticide application to expand volume beyond his 56-acre cemetery operation. He had experienced men and equipment, and he was a turfgrass specialist. His commercial lawn service business now includes 4500 customers which keep his seven 2-man crews (all of whom are state-licensed custom applicators). He services private homes, apartment complexes, factories, hospitals, and motels, plus a mobile home park.

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IN INDUSTRIAL WEED CONTROL Alvin Price runs an industrial weed control business. His accounts—mostly with the oil industry—stretch over a 7-state area of the mid-and southwest. Also serviced by Price are public utilities, parks, airfields, industrial yards, roadsides, and parking lots. He has sold the contract applicator concept by showing customers that he can safely do the job at about one-third what they have been spending with their in-company operations.

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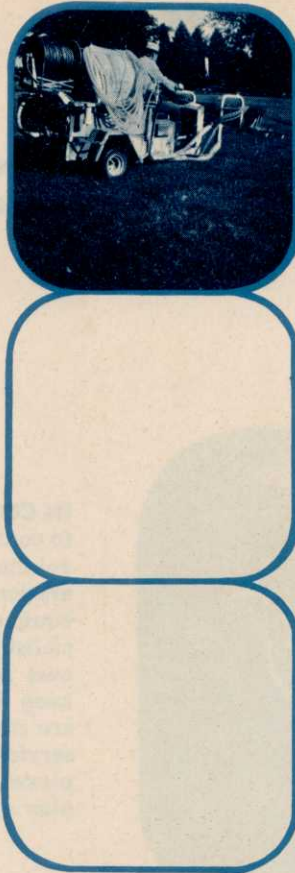


IN TREE CARE F. Lewis Dinsmore typifies the tree care company which has developed a large custom pesticide application business. Dinsmore says that his company plans general tree work around the more profitable phase of the business, which he says for his group, is spraying. When conditions are unfit for spraying, Dinsmore says, crews can pick up waiting tree work. He has been in the business some 40 years, the past 35 as manager of his own company.

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IN COMMERICAL TURF

RIPPER: "Men stay busy on one project or another, all year; that way I can keep experienced men."



CARL RIPPER owns Resthaven Cemetery at Des Moines, Ia. A short time back he saw little chance for expansion beyond the 56 acres he had set aside for Resthaven. He needed other outlets to utilize his own and his employees' experience in commercial turfgrass management.

For years, visitors to the cemetery, and even neighbors in the vicinity, had queried Ripper as to how he kept the grounds so beautiful. Why didn't he have the same problems they did with dandelions, crab grass, and the myriad weeds and fungus diseases which plague lawns.

He concluded that there would be money in doing it for them on a contract basis. He started small, but with the operation growing faster than the dandelions and other weeds he controls, in 1971 Ripper served 4,500 customers. These include private lawns, apartment grounds, factory lawns, hospital grounds, and motel areas. He even maintained the plots for a mobile home park.

Ripper has developed a streamlined operation which gives prompt professional service at reasonable prices. He has seven 2-man crews. All employees are state-licensed custom applicators. Their rigs are self-sustaining. Each carries tanks, pumps and extension hoses so that

truck travel across turf is at a minimum.

"The operators are on commission," says Ripper. "When they go out on assignment, it pays to pick up all the extra business they can." With their experience and equipment, they can do an average lawn — front and back — in about 15 minutes.

All rigs are in two-way radio contact with the office. Marian Boxwell — Miss Turfer — handles all calls from customers, and keeps in constant radio contact with the men on the rigs. If an order comes in from a neighborhood where a crew is working, she radios them and the job is handled immediately. "In the spring and fall, I get as many as 75 calls a day," she says.

In the beginning, the business grew by word of mouth, but now Ripper promotes it with direct mail. Ahead of the spring and fall spraying seasons, he sends out 6000 postcards to old customers and prospective new ones. Each is hand-addressed.

Dandelions, broadleaf weeds and crab grass are the biggest motivators for business. Ripper also offers a fertilization program. "Recently, we have been getting more and more calls about sod worm," he says. "It seems to be invading the midwest."

Ripper gives much credit for his results in the cemetery, and with

his new customers, to Dacthal W-75, a wettable powder herbicide produced by Diamond Shamrock Chemical Company. He counts on it to control most annual grasses and certain broadleaf weeds.

His lawn applications are carefully calibrated. He applies Dacthal W-75 at a rate of 16 pounds per acre, mixed in 60 to 70 gallons of water. He also uses Diamond Shamrock's dacamine, a water-emulsifiable and oil-soluble 2,4-D formulation.

Much of Ripper's present spraying is done in the spring. "People are lawn-conscious then," he says. But he is getting more and more fall orders. "I think fall spraying does a better job on dandelions and other broadleaf weeds," he points out. "You have a longer spraying season, up to 10 weeks. There is less wind in the fall, too. And I think the turf is less tender than in the spring. The perennial and biennial weeds are more susceptible. If there is moisture in the ground, or if you get one good rain, you are in business."

Ripper's diversification philosophy extends into still other fields. On the acres set aside for the cemetery but still unused, he has a thriving Christmas tree farm. He is also part-owner of a large tract in Des Moines which is gradually being developed as an industrial park.

Meanwhile, Ripper runs the land as a sod farm. He uses it in the cemetery, supplies it to his lawn customers, and sells it commercially.

He sees an extra benefit in his variety of projects. "I have gone a long way toward solving my labor problem," he points out. "There are no unreliable part-time people around here. My men can stay busy, on one project or another, all year. That way, I can keep experienced men on my permanent payroll. They don't care whether they are working on lawns, the cemetery, the Christmas trees, or the sod farm. They like the work, and they know what they are doing."

Resthaven Cemetery, where his business started, is one of the most beautiful in the Midwest. There are no tombstones at grave sites. Each is marked by a bronze plaque, imbedded at ground level. Ripper has two reasons for using plaques—one esthetic, the other practical. He feels that the absence of tombstones makes it possible to landscape for greater beauty.

On the practical side, the plaques make maintenance easier, require less labor. However, they create an-

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IN INDUSTRIAL WEED CONTROL

PRICE: "We run a business type operation . . . we train our men."

A PROFESSIONAL contract applicator whose business is industrial weed control uses some solid management policies in upgrading this end of the industry.

He is Alvin Price, president of Kem-Weed Control, Inc., headquartered at Enid, Okla.

Says Price, "Our job is to satisfy our customers that we operate with the best interest of both customer and society. We sell safe pesticide use. We train our own people to understand and safely use pesticides. We run a business type operation.

"Doing this, we have been able to develop a competent company which has steadily grown." Kem-Weed Control began as a single office in Wichita, Kansas, in 1960; today claims a trade territory covering all of Oklahoma, Kansas, Arkansas, parts of Texas, Nebraska, Colorado, and Missouri.

"Unfortunately, this is an industry that has never had a training program," Price says. "There are no technical schools for application of chemicals, so it is a pretty costly experience when hiring a man."

To help his men learn, Price compiles his own training materials. Some are adapted from personal field experience. Other information is obtained from university seminars, Agriculture Department releases, and weed control conferences.



New Kem-Weed employees receive on-the-job training from an experienced applicator. After an extended period, the trainee is given a written test to determine if he has learned enough about chemicals, application techniques, and safety procedures to work alone.

Safety meetings, every six weeks, keep all employees updated on new developments within the industry and on ecological trends.

Ecological awareness within the herbicide industry as a whole is not new, Price says. "Everybody in our business is acutely aware the chemicals used should not be toxic, and if there is any one statement that makes a competent weed control man want to take up arms it is to hear someone say, 'Well, there goes another load of weed poison.' This simply is not true. Most of the chemicals we use today are safe as the salt on the family table, and much safer than aspirin."

Kem-Weed's basic herbicide is Bromosil Hyvar X, which can be formulated as a wettable powder, liquid, or pellets. Nonselective, Bromosil is compatible with most crop protection chemicals, yet remains inflammable and noncorrosive. Sprayed in controlled zones, it attacks weed roots, then dissipates.

"It does not kill the soil," Price says. "After two years, in almost

every case, you have a return of vegetation — never know it's been sprayed."

Approximately 90 percent of Kem-Weed's business is related to the oil industry. They also service public utilities, parks, airfields, industrial yards, roads, and parking lots.

"Parking lots are one of the newest things," Price says. "We put the chemical down before the contractor lays his asphalt. The seeds underneath don't sprout and push up the asphalt."

When talking to prospective customers, Price promotes the industry by presenting a twenty-minute slide program. Entitled, "Safety Thru Chemical Weed Control," it points out the hazards of fire, snakes, poison, weeds, holes, and insects for employees and equipment. The value of public relations is an added selling factor for keeping well-kept grounds.

Before the advent of chemicals, weed control was accomplished with elbow grease, Price relates. Roustabout crews spent their summers going from one location to another, chopping weeds in a never-ending and costly job. Chemical control, today, he says, is the least expensive way to adequately control vegetation.

Supporting this, DuPont supplies figures showing mowing costs for a typical refinery average \$889 an acre annually. An industrial application of herbicides costs the same plant, on a five-year-contract, a yearly average of \$261 an acre.

Kem-Weed's pricing is figured by the square foot and unit. The fee for most tank batteries, wells, and cattle guards costs between fifty to seventy-five dollars the first year. Subsequent years run between thirty-five to fifty dollars.

The primary problem in the weed control industry today, as Price sees it, is the instability of prices for services. "A good many people try to get into the business, thinking the entrance is thru cheaper services," he says. "But this usually brings about customer dissatisfaction because of inadequate equipment and improperly trained personnel. It results in the failure of the new company, and loss of business for established ones."

To have a profitable operation, Price considers it necessary to cover a large territory to sustain volume. Kem-Weed Control now maintains company headquarters at Enid, with an office at Wichita, and another at Meade, Kansas.

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IN TREE CARE

DINSMORE: "We plan our tree work around spraying, and keep our experienced men employed."

MOST TREE CARE COMPANIES today depend on their contract application service to keep business on the upswing. Dinsmore Tree Service Company, St. Louis, Mo., offers a good example.

As company president, F. Lewis Dinsmore, states, "Profits in the business today depend on spraying and tree moving. This makes for careful scheduling and timely service."

"We try and plan our general tree work around the more profitable phase of the business, which for us is spraying, and keep our experienced men employed."

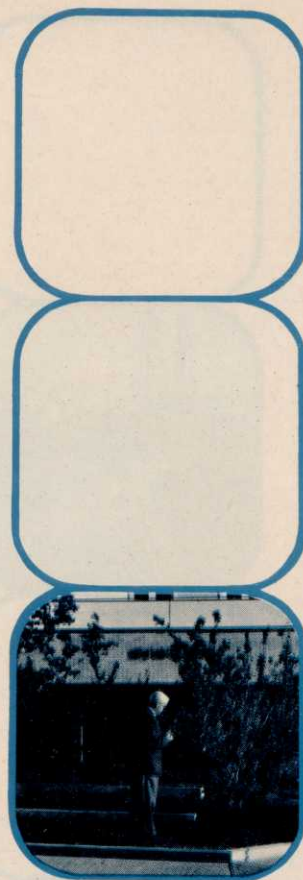
"When conditions are unfit for spraying — such as mildly windy days, men can be used to pick up waiting tree work."

Dinsmore has spent 40 years in the business, first as an employee, then a self-employed lone operator, and for the past 35 years as manager and owner of a going concern. With him in business today are his brother, W. T. (Red), and his son, Lew. Normally, they carry about 20 employees.

Management in this firm almost might be called a formula for operation. Regular rules are in effect for keeping down shop time hours. They have come as a result of experience and service to long-time customers. Rule No. 1 consists of zoning the St.

Louis area. In short, Dinsmore has laid out his own system of zoning to fit the areas he serves. He covers the greater metropolitan St. Louis area but still finds his business concentrated more in some areas than in others. In determining size and scope of zones, the number of customers and the type of business is taken into consideration. Each foreman is assigned a zone for which he becomes responsible. This works especially well for the usual types of spraying, but tree work is also handled in this manner. By having a zone to work, foremen save travel and route time by careful scheduling. They do very little backtracking. "Jobs are not handled as they come in but by where they are located, that is," Dinsmore says, "if people will stand for it." Spray work, for example, is scheduled in advance to take advantage of the zone system. Customers are assured that their work will be done "at the proper time."

Annual service contracts are perhaps as important as any one factor in reducing unproductive hours. These, coupled with new jobs permit foremen more leeway in scheduling. Summer spraying and dormant oil spraying during late winter or early spring can be scheduled well in advance and an efficient route scheduled planned.



Many longtime customers are not on annual service contracts but expect Dinsmore Tree Service to provide them regular service. Dinsmore reaches these people, and others as well, by mail. He uses direct mail service to about 3000 selected customers each month. These mail pieces are reminders to call in for service, aimed at keeping last minute scheduling to a minimum. Just because Dinsmore provides a service to a customer in his prime target area does not qualify that customer for direct mail service. This service is limited to longtime private and commercial customers rather than to the customers who only use a professional arborist for emergency and special jobs. Copy in the direct mail piece usually concerns spraying, tree moving, and general tree care. He also reminds customers that trees are available.

Direct mail is the only type of advertising which Dinsmore uses on a regular basis. Like other businessmen he supports community ventures such as school yearbooks and the like. But general advertising as such has never been a practice of the company. He has found that regular customers and referrals have combined to keep his crews busy through the years. Much of this must be attributed to providing good service at a fair price.

Free coffee also cuts unproductive hours. Dinsmore keeps a big coffee urn full of fresh brew for his crews; has it ready along with donuts or cookies a half hour before they leave on jobs. This, he says, eliminates the lost time crews use by stopping for coffee enroute to the job. Further, it boosts employee morale and saves the worker spending out-of-pocket change on the job. The employee thinks the free coffee and donuts are a good deal, and a favor from the company. Dinsmore believes this practice does more than save time. Along with the banter, normal in a coffee session, he finds that the men exchange job experience and gain from the morning sessions.

Another shop time saver is housing one foreman in a home at the nursery. The foreman does the tree digging with power equipment and is always on hand to help the driver load a tree. This saves sending an extra man along to pick up the tree. Also, if the wind is too high for spraying, the foreman stays on the job at the nursery. Both he and his brother maintain tree nurseries.

Dinsmore follows the practice of keeping well-trained men as the

(Continued on page 34)



Lewis Dinsmore looks over tree plantings he has made at Northwest Shopping Center, St. Louis.

TREE CARE (from page 14)

hard core of his business. These men are hired on a full-time basis and guaranteed year-round labor. Part-time help is hired for seasonal work.

Probably more important than the productive hours saved by Dinsmore's management practices is business acumen. An auditor furnishes him a monthly report. This report, drawn by the auditor from bookkeeping entries supplied by Dinsmore's long-time secretary and receptionist, Charlotte Watson, gives costs of sales, a statement of condition of the business, and a profit-and loss statement. He uses this monthly information on which to base his prices. Dinsmore operates on the theory that you can't wait the better part of a season to learn whether the small percentage increase being paid for materials is affecting the profit structure. He doesn't believe price is the key factor in gaining and holding customers. Most of the private customers who make up 80% of his business, and the remaining 20% who are commercial accounts, are more interested in service and reliability than in a few dollars less on the cost of a job.

Equipment used is pretty much standard in the industry. For his spraying business, he uses jeeps with 60-gallon John Bean tanks and pumps. Vehicles are equipped with special dual tires so in many cases, especially larger jobs, they may drive over turfgrass during treatment. Hoses are used to reach areas where hand spraying is necessary. During the busy season, six qualified crews are on the job.

For the future, Dinsmore predicts an acceleration in business for the industry. More people with greater appreciation for tree beauty will

continue to increase the demand. Dinsmore points to the growth of garden clubs, the moving of businesses from railroad sidings to highways where they are developed into

COMMERCIAL TURF (from page 12)

other kind of a problem. As summer progresses, and the ground dries, crab grass spreads over the markers and through the dormant blue grass. It takes extra mowing and even hand-trimming to control it. That's why he went searching for a herbicide that would get the crab grass but would not corrode the markers. Dacthal W-75, which he found being used on the athletic fields at Iowa State University, proved to be the answer to both problems.

"Some folks may think it is unusual for a cemetery owner to be mixed up in so many other activities," says Ripper. "But you can't go on for ever making your cemetery bigger. Eventually you run out of land. You either start over in a

showplaces, and general strength of the economy. These factors, he believes, are keys.

Dinsmore Shop Time Savers

1. Zoning the area served to save backtracking by crews.
2. Annual service contracts for advance scheduling.
3. Direct mail to regular clients as reminders for coming seasonal work and to help increase advance scheduling.
4. General tree work handled during slow periods.
5. Company coffee to eliminate enroute coffee stops.
6. Housing located at nursery site.
7. Maintaining hard core of year-round experienced men and supplementing with part-time labor.

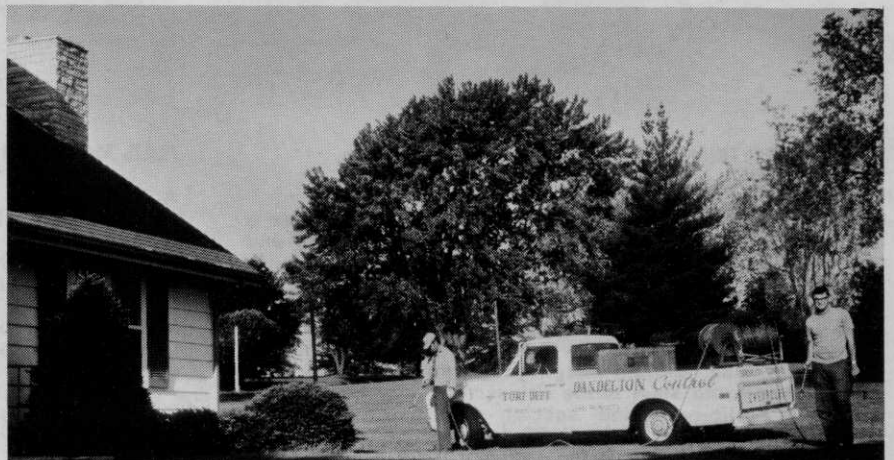
new place, or be satisfied with what you have."

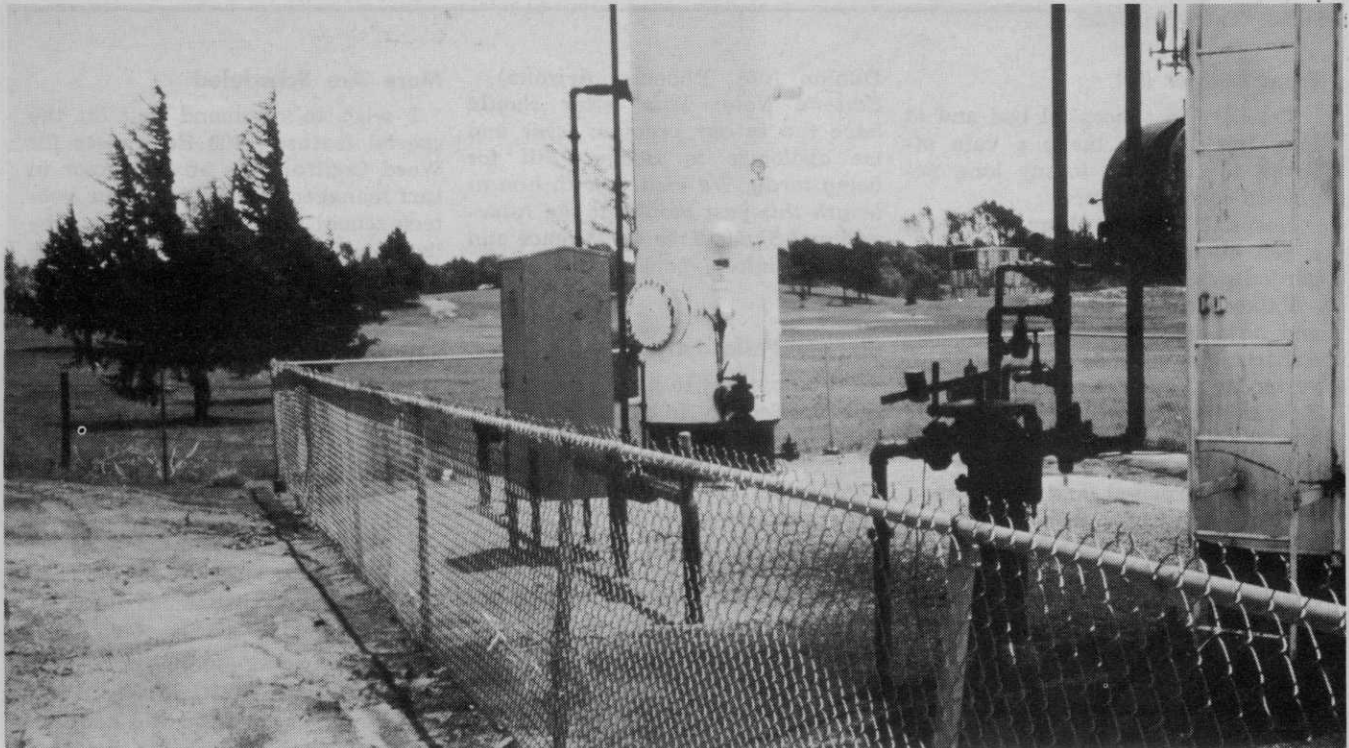
To Ripper, diversification proved to be the answer. He believes that lawn maintenance will continue to grow as a market. "I'm amazed at how much people will spend to have a good-looking lawn, and how little they know about what it takes to do it."

With labor difficult to get, he also likes the idea of having a permanent, experienced crew with him year in and year out.

Once the cemetery uses up the land he now has in Christmas trees, and, when the industrial park covers his sod farm, Ripper will probably have both operations going at another location.

Ripper uses seven 2-man crews such as this to serve 4500 customers including private lawns, apartment grounds, factory lawns, hospital grounds, and motel areas.





Clean area around liquid petroleum gas storage area show the effectiveness of chemical weed control.

INDUSTRIAL WEED CONTROL

(from page 13)

The company's four applicators are provided with especially designed trucks equipped with John Bean spray equipment. The use of 600-gallon, two-compartment tanks allows the applicator to select the proper chemical for the job while on location.

"This ability to change formulas is quite a savings in a day's work when you are 50 to 150 miles away from your base station," Price says.

Kem-Weed also uses an added disappearing marking agent when spraying. Of two-fold benefit, the green dye helps the applicator obtain even distribution and shows the customer where the chemical has been applied.

Inspection is also a big part of the game. "In the summertime, we go back to each area we have serviced to make sure the chemical is working properly. We honestly try to provide the type of service we would want if a purchaser," Price says.

The future of the industry, Price believes, lies in building greater confidence between companies to aid in the exchange of new ideas, methods, and in performing experimental work.

President of the Mid-Continent Weed Control Association, he would like to see chemical rates, chemical types, and equitable application standards established for greater safety throughout the industry.



Alvin Price, above, and Dusty O'Hair, below. All Kem-Weed applicator trucks are equipped with automatic hose take-up reels and normally carry 300 feet of hose. Manifold system allows drainage of either or both truck tanks.

