

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.

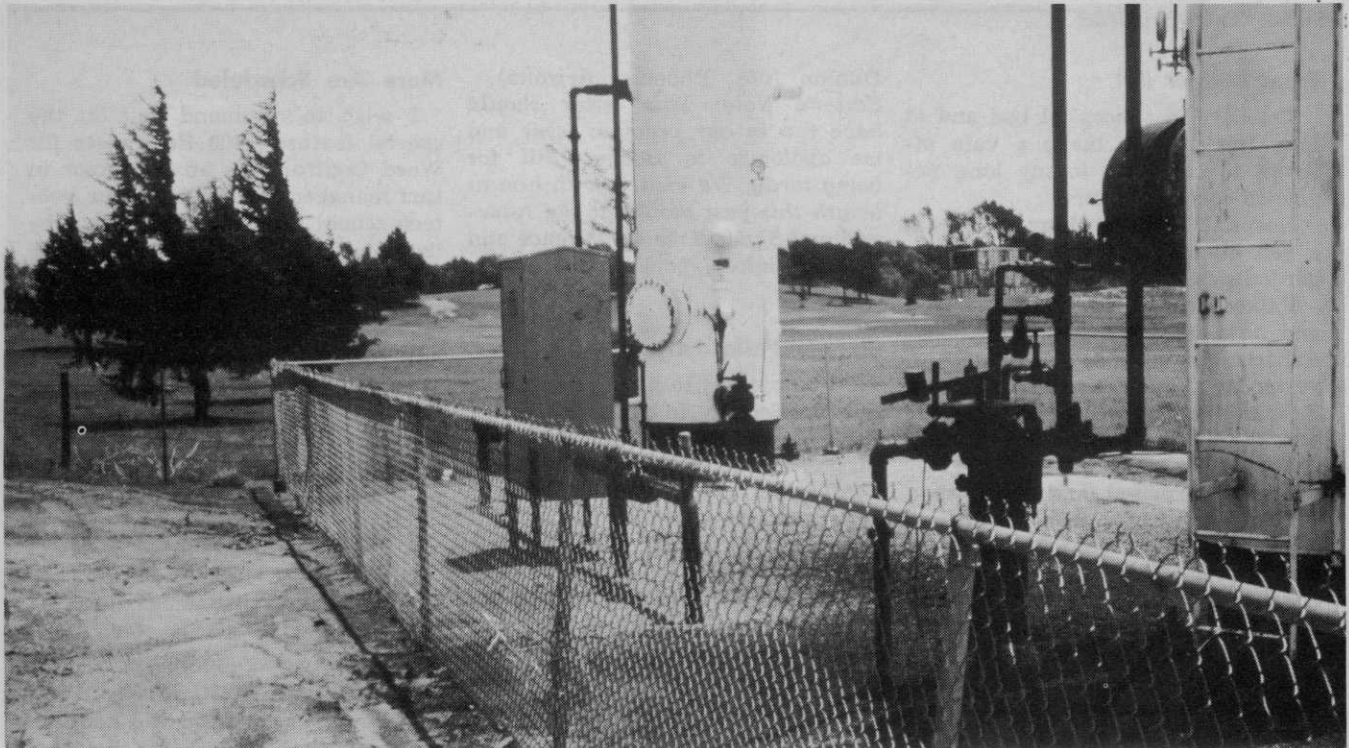
Supporting this, DuPont supplies figures showing mowing costs for a typical refinery average \$889 an acre annually. An industrial application of herbicides costs the same plant, on a five-year-contract, a yearly average of \$261 an acre.

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

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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.

