

ECOLOGY — It Won't Go Away

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WEBSTER devotes nine lines to ecology. Plus six more lines for ecologist. In shirt-sleeve English, ecology means living in harmony with nature. The press and TV have tried to make ecology a synonym for pollution.

Complacency won't solve pollution, or make ecology a forgotten word. (In 1958 Doubleday published my book *Gardens & Outdoor Living*: When asked what they could say about me on the book jacket, and told that I called myself a landscape ecologist, Doubleday's sales manager commented, "That'll never sell any books — what else can we call you other than an ecologist?" And that was only a dozen years ago.)

Americans have changed — and America will, which means that every landscape contractor must drastically change his business methods. For every time he does a job he sets in motion a long train of events. Not of his doing — but happening because of what he started.

Have you ever taken the time to think through the likely consequences of what you start on a specific job? You will. Or your firm will die. For you will be held accountable in the future for whatever happens after you leave the scene under moral pressure in '72, and legal restraint after the 1970's. This will be local first, then nation-wide. It is both good and sound politics.

Some specific predictions are:

1. The legal concept of "attractive nuisance" will be extended to cover situations way beyond Nader's dreams.

2. Every job will be sold under an implied guarantee of safety and value — difficult as the latter may be for you to "swallow" today!

3. Cut & fill permits will be tightly controlled — down to changes of 1-2 feet (with ruinous litigation bringing violators to bankruptcy).

4. Swimming pool installation will be costly (has the home swimming pool outlived its time; a horrifying thought, but a question worth pondering).

Dr. Howland's presentation is based on his appearance before the recent annual meeting of the California Landscape Contractors Association. He was sponsored by Nunes Turfgrass Nurseries, Inc., Patterson, Calif.

5. Density regulations will get universal and strict enforcement — such as families per acre, of course; but of even more interest to us today, visual pollution will be barred — when and where you can build a fence — or plant a tree! And noise will be recognized for what it is — harmful, avoidable wasted energy which can be easily controlled legally.

You may think it won't happen! Not to you. But consider the changes forced on P&G, Ford Motor Company, Boise Cascade, Union Oil Company and others.

There are five important actions each contractor ought to take, and right now:

1. Think through and write down the practical alternates open to your firm as each of these changes comes to your town. (Many people find it speeds up their thinking if they write down the alternates in the form of a chart.)

2. Estimate the consequences; can your firm survive?

3. Decide which risks are worth taking — and for how long. (Your goal as a manager of a business is to have thought out ahead of time what you will do — and when you will do it — before circumstances force you to make an instant or even a hasty decision.)

4. Recognize that political expediency will bring nasty surprises (like the hasty DDT ban); look every risk over for its political attractiveness.

5. Keep alert — read! My choice is SUNSET. It is not 100% infallible, of course. But management has full-time "alerters" poking around the homes of Californians every day in the week. They do spot trends.

And equally as important as SUNSET is SATURDAY REVIEW.

To keep yourself alert to changes in how people live; what people want from life today; and what they expect from you, consider the following:

a) Services not products — henceforth they want to know the upkeep cost per month, not just the landscape installation contract.

b) Chance to be proud of the way they use their time, not pride in an accumulation of "symbols of suc-

cess" like a fancy house and garden, two big cars, a swimming pool, etc.

c) Instant landscaping — for average home occupancy, i.e. how often the family moves (now averaging less than three years).

d) Minimum demands on family labor for upkeep; teenagers are "unavailable" for yard work — and the average family now goes on for 16 or more years after youngest in the family reaches 18.

e) Willingness to supply whatever is wanted — for people today are conditioned to know that "it is possible" if the landscape contractor cares enough to want to supply.

Changes made for good reasons are good for business. Ecology can be the best thing that ever happened to the landscape contractor. For it is forcing him to get ready for change, by thinking thru what are the best alternatives open to him when change comes.

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