

Assoc. Landscape Contractor Faults Highway Construction

"Survival in the roadside landscape business has become a real chore. The guidelines under which we operate, in many cases, hinder more than help our survival," said Norman Gay, president of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America, who recently addressed the Ohio Short-Course on Roadside Development in Columbus Ohio.

According to the chief elected officer of the 400 member trade association, a major point of criticism is simply red tape.

"A waiting period of final payments in some places can be one year or longer. Many times this money is the landscape contractor's working capital. Without a friendly banker he can be in trouble and this is on contracts with protective payment and performance bonds," Gray asserted.

"There should be no release on final payments to a general contractor until he has proper payment releases for all material payments and final payments to all concerned."

Gray pointed out that the current conditions in landscape contracting are contributing to the 32% annual attrition rate in the landscape industry, the highest in the construction field.

"On sodding," according to the Mansfield, Massachusetts landscape contractor, "we are told how to do it, when to do it, the kind and quantities of seed and fertilizer to use. Many times we are directed to seed inert material without organic content. In many contracts, instructions on seeding are written without the benefit of a soil test." After such imposed restrictions, the landscape contractor is told he must guarantee grass growth.

Gray endorsed the American Sod Producers Association for their "excellent job in updating specifications for sodding operations" particularly as it relates to thickness of cuts; and suggested they be considered whenever possible.

He recommended the following payment schedule: 5% limitation on retainage; 10% retained until 50% of the job is complete, after which no more than 5% is retained; 2% on jobs over \$250,000 once the entire job has been substantially complete. Owners should be obligated to put retentions in escrow with the interest accrued to the benefit of the contractor. When a project is complete, final payments should be made within 30 days.

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