

# NLA finds landscape guarantees widespread

A recent survey by the National Landscape Association revealed that guarantees of plants and labor are offered by a majority of landscape firms. Ninety-seven percent of the firms responding to the survey indicated some type of warranty was provided.

The results also showed that plant material guarantees are more common than labor guarantees. No preference was revealed for full versus limited warranties, although the time period covered varied widely.

The customer was assured of satisfactory plants in 92 percent of the landscape firms' guarantees. The warranty usually stipulated that the customer assume the responsibility for the care and maintenance of the newly-installed plants. Regional differences in the percentage of firms that guaranteed plants appeared:

Northeast .....	98%
Southern .....	97%
Great Lakes .....	88%
Western Plains .....	88%
Southwestern, Pacific and other .....	92%

It is interesting to note that the percentage guaranteed decreases in the Great Lakes and Western Plains regions by about ten percent. Moreover, many firms stated a time period of "one growing season" in both

these regions. These differences may be attributable to the severity of winters. Note that the percentage rose again in the Far West regions.

Another significant finding was the lower percentage of firms offering guarantees of labor. Labor coverage is definitely lower than plant coverage — only 62 percent of labor is guaranteed nationwide. Companies seem to generally guarantee the labor performance 100 percent, 50 percent, or not at all — very few percentages in between.

Again, there were regional differences:

Northeast .....	74%
Southern .....	52%
Great Lakes .....	72%
Western Plains .....	48%
Southwestern, Pacific, and other .....	58%

The percentages in the Southern and Western Plains areas are significantly lower than the Northeast and Great Lakes areas. In both of these areas firms generally guarantee their labor 100 percent or not at all.

The landscape guarantee survey also questioned the type of guarantee/warranty provided, specifying that a full guarantee requires replacement or repair of a product (that is defective or fails) within a reasonable

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time at no cost: anything else is a limited guarantee. No preference for a full rather than a limited guarantee appeared, however; respondents split almost evenly nationwide: 73 offered full guarantees, while 71 offered limited.

The final question on the NLA survey concerned the time period covered by the guarantee of plants and/or labor. The respondents chose between "one calendar year," "months," and "other." Most landscape firms (53 percent of the survey respondents) base their guarantees on one calendar year:

Northeast .....	26 (of 36 respondents)
Southern .....	12 (of 20)
Great Lakes .....	26 (of 37)
Western Plains .....	25 (of 39)
Southwestern, Pacific and other .....	10 (of 16)

These 38 firms, however, differed widely in the number of months specified — from one to nine months after installation. The average number of months nationwide was 4.4. Regionally, the Northeast and the Western Plains were high (5.1 and 5.5 respectively); the Great Lakes and the Southwestern, Pacific and other regions specified an average of 4.5 and 4.3 months

respectively; and the Southern region guaranteed their plants for 3.5 months.

Other time periods specified included "one year from installation," "one growing season," or until a certain date after installation such as August 1 or November 1. (Due to possible consumer misunderstanding, NLA recommends that precise time guarantees be used in lieu of "one growing season.") One firm dealing entirely with industrial landscaping, replaced and replanted until the customer was satisfied.

The NLA survey demonstrated that guarantees/warranties are common among landscape firms, especially for plant coverage. Labor is guaranteed by fewer firms. The respondents split in preference for full or limited guarantees, and most seemed to base their guarantees on a one-year period. The Northeast and Great Lakes regions showed similarities in almost all categories (e.g. high percentage coverage of plants and labor, preference for full guarantees, and one calendar year coverage.) In contrast, the Southern and Western Plains states revealed similarities in low incidence of labor guarantees, preference for limited guarantees, and coverage for specified time periods. The Southwestern Pacific and other regions were middle-of-the-road. □

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