

# CEMETERIES STRIVE HARDER TO CONTROL MAINTENANCE COST

The importance of maintenance costs in cemetery management is increasing steadily, even though less than 25 percent of the cemetery managers polled by Weeds Trees & Turf currently have a separate maintenance budget.

Russell Rager, director of Washington Park Cemetery East of Indianapolis, told 1,200 cemetery managers at a recent joint meeting of the National Association of Cemeteries and the American Cemetery Association in Chicago, "Only a few cemetery managers are budgeters. Few of them keep an overall budget based upon departmental budgets prepared by subordinates. A cemetery operation should have a sales budget, an administrative budget, and a maintenance budget if it is to achieve its maximum potential in terms of profit."

Out of 990 cemetery managers sent questionnaires, 167 replied.

Based upon their returns, larger cemeteries dominated. The average acreage managed by respondents was 98 acres, with 72 acres of developed area. An average of 72.5 percent of the grounds is actively maintained, indicating that more than 25 percent on average is held in reserve.

Full-time staff for maintenance averaged five persons, with three persons part-time and five on a seasonal basis.

Of the 25 percent who keep separate maintenance budgets, the average was \$47,600, or \$660 per acre maintained (\$47,600 divided by 72).

Fertilizer, sod, and trees are the largest non-equipment expenses. Herbicides and insecticides are the next highest non-equipment expenses. Cemetery managers do not use significant amounts of soil fumigants, growth regulators, fungicides, or aquatic herbicides according to the survey.

The cemetery managers indicated they plan maintenance expenditures from October through January, and in July. They place orders for chemicals mainly from February through April, with a second order in August or September.

Equipment orders are placed earlier, from January through March with another buying period in September through November. The majority of products are purchased from local suppliers, especially equipment.

The average annual seed purchase by the managers was 600 lbs. The seed is used to some extent every month except January, with surges in April, May, September and October. Twenty percent indicated brand or cultivar type, mainly the larger cemetery managers.

Self-propelled mowers are the most common pieces of equipment owned by cemeteries. The 1,250 cemetery managers receiving Weeds Trees & Turf own a projected 4,450 units. The dominant type of self-propelled mower is rotary (3,580), followed by reel (830) and flail (45).

A projected 3,375 tractors, 1,500 equipped with mowing attachments, are owned by the 1,250 cemeteries. The vast majority of these (87 percent) are in the 60 hp or less category.

In addition to tractors, the cemeteries own a projected 1,380 backhoes, 800 front end loaders, and 2,150 utility vehicles. Other numbers of equipment owned are: trim mowers — 4,280, flexible line trimmers — 2,210, spreaders and seeders — 1,900, compressed air sprayers — 1,430, portable spraying systems — 530, and sod cutters — 475.

Types of equipment owned in significantly small numbers are tree transplanters — 10, aerators — 216, verticutters and thatchers — 550.

When asked about plans to buy equipment, respondents said purchases of trim mowers, flexible line trimmers, self-propelled mowers, backhoes and tractors were planned.

The most common types of maintenance and construction work performed by cemetery crews are seeding, sod installation, fertilization, mowing, planting and care of

## Percentage of Purchasing by Month.

Month	Fertilizers	Pesticides	Herbicides	Equipment
January	5.5%	4.4%	7.4%	18.8%
February	16.0%	14.1%	16.2%	11.7%
March	20.5%	20.7%	21.3%	18.2%
April	9.5%	14.1%	11.8%	7.8%
May	5.0%	13.3%	6.6%	5.8%
June	2%	10.4%	7.4%	3.9%
July	3%	3.7%	4.4%	2.6%
August	7.5%	5.2%	7.4%	3.2%
September	15.5%	6.7%	6.6%	5.8%
October	10.5%	3.0%	4.4%	9.1%
November	2.5%	2.2%	3.7%	7.1%
December	2.5%	2.2%	2.9%	5.8%

## Month Planning Takes Place.

Month	Percentage
January	18.4
February	4.1
March	5.1
April	5.1
May	9.2
June	9.2
July	10.2
August	4.1
September	3.1
October	8.2
November	12.2
December	11.2

ornamentals. Jobs performed most often by outside contractors are tree trimming and pest control, and drainage installation.

Some interesting comments made by respondents are:

"We are in the process of turning our herbicide, fungicide, and insecticide work over to a commercial spray firm."

"Survey will make us look like a small market, yet we spend thousands of dollars per year for equipment made for a homeowner or obstruction-free golf course."

"We are forced to construct or adapt equipment to meet our needs."

According to the National Association of Cemeteries, there are 10,000 actively managed cemeteries in the United States. John Neal, president of Jefferson Memorial Park in Pittsburgh and past president of NAC, estimates that roughly 2,000 of the 10,000 are highly maintained. He also pointed out that there are many more small church and town cemeteries not included in the 10,000 figure.

#### Annual Expenditures

Item	Median	% with Non-Zero Response	Mean	Projection to 1,250 Readers
dry fertilizer	\$700	88.1%	\$1,150	\$1,260,000
post-emergence herbicide	\$300	54.1%	\$499	\$335,000
pre-emergence herbicide	\$300	41.1%	\$550	\$280,000
aquatic herbicide	\$100	15.5%		
insecticide	\$200	57.7%	\$525	\$376,000
systemic fungicide	\$200	4.8%		
contact fungicide	\$100	10.4%		
wetting agents	\$50	20.4%		
growth retardants	\$200	23.6%	\$320	\$ 93,600
Soil fumigants		4.8%		
sod	\$800	49.5%	\$1,624	\$997,000
trees	\$500	76.5%	\$898	\$852,000
ornamentals	\$500	73.1%	\$748	\$678,000

Cemetery management is a cost conscious business, yet the cemetery market is a significant part of the Green Industry. Better budgeting practices and an increased interest

in plant management can significantly improve the condition of all size cemeteries and perhaps help manufacturers to serve them better.  
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