

# ASPLUNDH IS LARGE PART OF RIGHT-OF-WAY HISTORY

Much of the basic research and development of today's herbicides have taken place on utility rights-of-way. Few companies have more experience in this area than Asplundh Tree Expert Company, Willow Grove, Pa. The company has grown with both the electric utility and herbicide industries. What they have learned and how they use herbicides is worth noting.

Asplundh began trimming trees for the Philadelphia Electric Co. in 1928. Bob Poley at Asplundh explains, "There were two reasons for the three Asplundh brothers to set up a business only for the utility industry; an early misunderstanding with a property owner over permission to trim his trees and a growing need by the utilities for an outside contractor to trim and maintain clearance around wires and substations." The company has grown to more than 9,000 employees throughout the U.S. and Canada.

Timing has been a crucial factor in the success of the Asplundh Tree Expert Co. Of equal value, has been the company's willingness to change and update their operations. For instance, when the company couldn't buy the type of insulated aerial lift equipment it needed for working around electric wires, it began making its own. Now Asplundh manufactures an entire line of equipment related to line clearance work.

In addition, Asplundh's method of trimming has changed through the years. The company now uses a newer trimming method, resembling natural pruning so that the appearance and "chemistry" of the tree remains undisturbed.

"When Amchem Products, Inc. developed 2,4-D during the World War II era, the Asplundh Company, along with Amchem's Director of Research, R.H. Beatty, recognized its use for vegetation management in right-of-way maintenance.

Not only has Asplundh carefully monitored its own use of chemicals, the field men also work closely with chemical companies to test new products before they enter the market.

Therefore, when Asplundh decided to use a "total vegetation control" material, they tested to find a safe product.

Total control is desirable at substation and storage areas where a certain amount of landscaping is necessary, but the area is remote and it's uneconomical to control noxious weeds by hand. The greatest danger is using a product which can "leach" or spread to other desirable vegetation.

"Amizine (Amchem Products) contains amitrole and simazine and is one of the least hazardous materials to use around ornamental plantings for total control," says David Fritsch, a chemical supervisor at Asplundh. "Low levels rarely move outside the area in which they are applied."

According to Fritsch, utility companies maintain substations with large transformers on a crushed rock base which many people find aesthetically offensive. So, to make these areas more visually palatable, Asplundh chemically treats these transformer bases. This is one area where a total vegetation control product becomes a necessity.

The creation of a fire break in highly flammable or potentially hazardous areas is another important use for such a product. "It can be used to destroy vegetation around refineries and tank farms where grasses and weeds could definitely present a fire hazard," says Burrell.

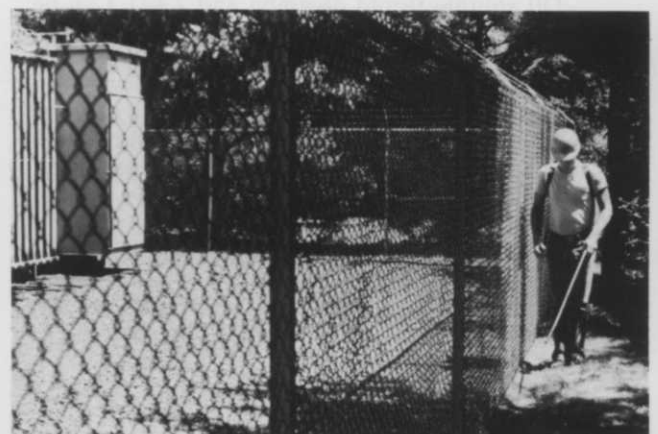
Asplundh is under contract with the Puget Sound Power and Light Company, Kirkland, Washington, to treat around utility poles in farming areas with a total control herbicide. For years farmers have been torching weeds in ditch banks bordering their property. While this is a quick way to get rid of the weeds, the fires often severely damage utility poles to the point that they must be replaced.

"Many methods have been used in the past to keep these poles from burning," says Asplundh. "Originally the utility tried putting metal shields

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In the early days of electric line maintenance, Asplundh had one-man crews with little equipment



An Asplundh worker uses amizine to control fence-line vegetation.



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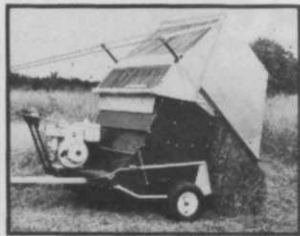


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around each pole or manually kept the grasses cut very short around the poles. But the metal shield acted as a furnace, transferring heat into the pole and causing it to burn, and the manual labor for cutting the grass was time-consuming and expensive."

Thus, a total vegetation control product seems to be the answer to this dilemma. Application is fast and easy, costs are low and the Puget Sound Power and Light Company has lost an average of one pole per year due to fire damage since they've been using this method — compared to up to a thousand a year with previous methods. Run-off into ditches nearby must be avoided.

Asplundh crews apply the herbicide annually in the early spring as soon as the snow melts. Higher rates are used for first treatment of poles but the rates are lowered for retreatment in ensuing years. For more efficient application of the material, Asplundh as modified a standard 300-gallon spray truck to include a boom and spring for the hose — to keep it off the ground — and a jump seat at the back for the person actually spraying. This way the crew is able to spray about 300 poles a day.

"When you consider that one pole costs about \$500 to replace — not to mention the inconvenience caused by a lapse in service — you realize that the cost of spraying is merely incidental to the utility company," says Asplundh. "They look at this type of work as preventive maintenance."

Since many states have actual vegetation control regulations to prevent the spread of noxious weeds, a total control product also helps the utility companies stay within the boundaries of the law.

In addition, driveways, fenced areas and pole yards — where cable, cross arms and poles are stored — are three other places where total control is desirable.

Total vegetation control represents only a small portion of the chemical services performed by Asplundh, but — other than manufacturing — chemical spraying is the biggest sideline of the company's line clearance work. **WTT**



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