

# THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT FOR INDUSTRIAL PARK LANDSCAPE CARE

Management of industrial park landscapes is more a function of the individual tenant within the development, or a landscape contractor hired by the tenant, than the developer or owner, according to the most recent survey by *Weeds Trees & Turf* magazine.

More than two thirds of the survey respondents indicated total control over landscape planning and maintenance by tenants. Typically those parks where each building has a number of tenants will be managed by the owner's agent. Those parks where entire buildings are built and owned by individual companies will be less involved in landscape decisions.

Nearly half the industrial park representatives indicated their parks are not fully developed. Combined with the attractiveness of other ventures due to high interest rates, industrial parks may face a lag of investors in the near future.

Despite a temporary slowdown, industrial park development is a practical alternative to older, more expensive buildings in urban centers. The idea took off in the late 60's as the U.S. Highway System made suburban industrial parks not only accessible to truck transportation, but closer to employees. Industrial parks were often supported by chambers of commerce to provide controlled growth while increasing the tax base.

One industrial park developer in St. Louis told *Weeds Trees & Turf* private industrial parks are often sold to tenants five to ten years after development. Many have been sponsored by private investors who seek a five to ten year payback. The attractiveness of industrial parks as an investment faded slightly under high interest rates, when investors were guaranteed 12 to 15 percent without great risk. As

money rates fall the industrial park once again becomes attractive.

Other industrial parks operate like residential developments, where streets, utilities and rights-of-way are taken over by the city after the development is built. Whether private or public, industrial parks face zoning regulations often slanted toward "clean" industry.

Survey respondents said companies pay for landscape maintenance in a monthly maintenance fee, directly to a landscape contractor, or separate payment to the park staff. Each represents a third of the survey. The park staff may contract out all or a portion of the work. Two of the property management firms in the survey had landscape divisions.

In addition to the multi-company park, a larger group of single-company, campus style offices exist in suburban areas near major cities. Distinguishing between the two types of facilities for this report would have limited value. Considerably more research is needed to quantify the market. Projections from data we have would suggest there are more than 3,000 industrial

parks in the U.S. Add the single-company industrial campus and the total approaches 10,000.

Landscape maintenance budgets of our respondents ranged from \$3,000 to \$1.2 million. The most common figure \$18,000, and the average was \$30,350. Projection to a universe of 10,000 facilities results in landscape maintenance expenses exceeding \$200 million.

Park size ranged from four acres to 5,000 acres. The most common

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Tenants have considerable control over landscaping of their buildings.

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size was 25 acres, but the average was 200 acres. Half the industrial park respondents indicated acreage for future development exists in current parks. This would reduce the area intensively landscaped. Overall, maintenance cost ranged from \$150 to \$720 per acre.

Nearly two-thirds of the respondents are responsible for both interior and exterior maintenance. They have an average full-time staff

**Table 1** Planning and Buying by Industrial Park Managers.

Month	Percent Planning	Equipment Percent Buying	Chemical Percent Buying
January	55	65	30
February	35	65	50
March	40	55	100
April	25	65	70
May	15	30	50
June	25	5	10
July	40	20	5
August	60	20	0
September	75	30	25
October	50	25	5
November	35	5	15
December	25	5	30

of 6 with part-time and seasonal help of 2 to 5.

Chemical purchases per year averaged \$4,250 for herbicides, \$3,000 for fertilizers, and \$2,075 for insecticides.

Industrial parks had an average of 6 push mowers, 3 riding mowers, 4 hand carried compressed air sprayers, 2 chain saws, and 3 pick-up trucks. Larger spray units were owned by more than half the respondents and a third had turf aerifying devices. Roughly half the parks had some form of irrigation to serve less than half the acreage. Almost two thirds of the irrigation systems were provided by the developer.

Local landscape supply distributors are used by three quarters of the respondents. More than a third bought some chemicals or equipment from local retail suppliers. A

Two thirds of the survey respondents are responsible for both interior and exterior maintenance.

fifth bought some materials directly from the manufacturer.

### Summary

As interest rates drop, not only will investors see industrial parks as more attractive, but companies seeking more efficient offices will become tenants or owners. The amount of undeveloped space in industrial parks may absorb the initial recovery, but the concept of suburban industrial parks remains an effective alternative to rising leases in urban centers.

As tenants take over parks from developers more landscaping work will be available to contractors. The fact that some property management firms are creating landscape divisions reflects the profitability and potential for this market.

Suburbs will continue to encourage development of clean, planned industrial parks to moderate the tax burden on homeowners. The motivation for future expansion of industrial parks exists today and will continue to grow.

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