

HELP WANTED

According to an exclusive WT&T survey, today's cemetery manager faces a large problem in finding capable help. Low wages resulting from low budgets put the manager in an unenviable situation.

by Ken Kuhajda, managing editor

Labor, restrictive budgets and weather. Today's cemetery landscape manager faces problems in those categories, according to a recent exclusive WEEDS TREES & TURF survey.

Today's cemetery manager is faced with unique landscape challenges, from rows of headstones that require special mowing to turf that is constantly being dug up and reseeded because of grave digging.

The job is challenging, the headaches that accompany can be substantial, but the rewards are there. Why else would the average respondent in our survey have 15 years experience at his current cemetery?

'Train, train, train'

By far the most pressing problem noted by 33% of the 56 respondents was lack of quality labor. Employees' skill levels usually match the low wage, noted several managers.

One respondent was open to suggestions about his employee problem. "We have a high rate of employee turnover. We try to adjust wages so both the cemetery and em-

ployee are happy. We give all employees some degree of responsibility," noted the manager.

The same manager said he gives employees a daily list of tasks to be performed and an employee may leave once he completes the list.

Still, he has not met total success. "I'm open to suggestions," he said.

Another respondent said "keeping employees happy" is his biggest problem. He does that through "lots of listening, praise, and concern for their welfare."

Yet another respondent quells his labor woes in a different way. "I hire as many retired and handicapped people as possible," he said.

When asked what he does to combat his labor woes, one respondent said quite simply: "Train, train, train."

The overall picture

Our survey indicated an average of 14.73 years at the same cemetery for managers.

The survey also revealed:

- an average developed acreage of 65.3 and average total acreage of 107.5;

- an average of one part-time and eight full-time employees;

- an average yearly expenditure of \$2,237 on turf and tree care, including \$1,638 on pesticides;

- an average annual equipment expenditure of \$6,991 (in this category most respondents said expenditures depend on need and age of equipment).

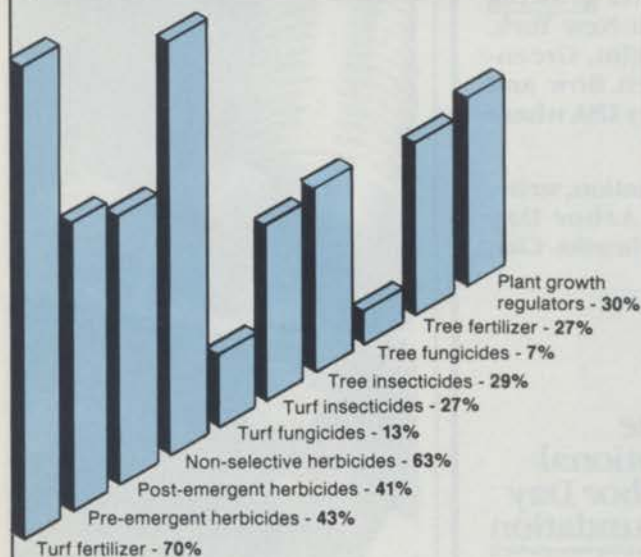
The survey asked managers what types of chemicals they use.

Their responses: 70% use turf fertilizer; 43% use pre-emergent herbicides; 41% use post-emergent herbicides; 63% use non-selective herbicides; 13% use turf fungicides; 27% use turf insecticides; 7% use tree fungicides; 27% use tree fertilizer; 29% use tree insecticide; and 30% use plant growth regulators.

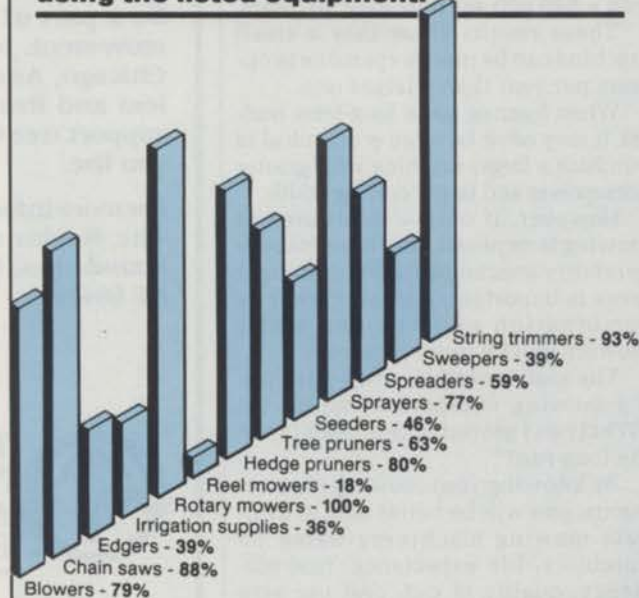
"Most chemicals discolor or harm bronze memorials," said one respondent. "Other than spraying with 2,4-D, we don't use chemicals."

Another listed broadleaf weed control as his biggest problem. He uses chemicals under trees, around shrubs, ivy, and head stones, but says "thorough coverage is close to impossible. Also, the trees pick up

Percentage of cemetery managers using the listed chemicals.



Percentage of cemetery managers using the listed equipment.



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the chemicals."

And one manager has drastically increased productivity through chemical use. "In the past we used edgers to clean but that is time-consuming and costly. We are now using post- and pre-emergent herbicides. This is a one-man job opposed to the three men we used with edgers."

The survey also asked about equipment use. Every cemetery manager surveyed used at least one rotary lawn mower. The results in other categories: 79% use blowers; 88% use chain saws; 39% use edgers; 36% use irrigation supplies; 18% use reel mowers; 80% use hedge pruners; 63% use tree pruners; 46% use seeders; 77% use sprayers; 59% use spreaders; 39% use sweepers; and 93% use string trimmers.

The smallish budget

Several respondents listed inadequate budgets as their biggest problem, pointing to a lack of knowledge among the people controlling the purse strings.

Said one: "This is a church-owned cemetery. The biggest problem is making the trustees realize the cemetery is not a poor cousin. We do the best job we can with the equipment supplied. I talk to every lot owner I

can and suggest they increase their endowment for lot care."

Said another: "We just don't have enough money to hire good help."

Added a third: "Limited funding and the age of the cemetery are our biggest problems. Cemetery maintenance is labor intensive. We are constantly searching for the most efficient methods available (like) eliminating

Perhaps another challenge facing cemetery managers is dealing with people in times of grief.

trimming, using proper equipment, and using chemicals to reduce man-hours where possible."

In addition to limited budgets, respondents mentioned weather as a huge headache. "The weather is quite a problem," said one. "By morning, all your plans can change." He said he has a back-up plan in case of poor weather.

Weather can be problematic for

Midwest and Northeast managers when they prepare for their biggest day—Memorial Day.

"Preparing for Memorial Day weekend, our biggest and most significant day of the year, begins in early spring as soon as the weather and grounds allow," said one manager. "Numerous other spring tasks must be performed within this crucial time period, while at the same time, we must keep pace with our present obligations."

A Midwest manager said trying to keep the cemetery looking its best for Memorial Day is his greatest challenge. "We hire extra help and pray that the weather cooperates. Then we hope that the mowers and trimmers don't all break down at once."

Another said weather creates problems when using liquid chemicals for weed control. "You have to play the game with nature's rules," he wrote.

Perhaps another challenge facing cemetery managers is dealing with people in times of grief. One manager related a lesson he has learned. "We realize people come first and then the maintenance."

The survey received a 28 percent response rate. **WT&T**