



County worker Dave Brackin uses a 200-gallon rig to control Johnsongrass.

# WEED ERADICATION

In sunny San Bernadino, bare ground next to the roadside is the aim of county agriculture workers.

by Ken Kuhajda, managing editor

**T**here's plenty of room for weed growth in the nation's largest county. But, fortunately, most of the 20,000 or so square miles of San Bernadino County in Southern California is desert where weed growth isn't a problem.

In the sprawling county's non-desert areas, though, weeds and other climatic conditions like the annual Santa Ana winds throw a challenge to county deputy agriculture commissioners John Gardner and Tom Baird, and their staffs.

Weed control is but a small, yet important, part of their jobs.

Gardner's responsibility is pesticide management (application) of roadside weed control. Paradoxically, Gardner also heads pesticide enforcement.

"We have kind of a schizophrenic role of enforcement and service combined," says Gardner, holder of a master's degree in pesticide

management from the University of California at Riverside.

Baird, a 20-year agriculture department worker, supervises fire hazard weed abatement. Both say their main function is enforcement of county codes.

Baird also oversees soil erosion control, issuing permits to farmers who've devised a plan to control the effects of the annual Santa Ana winds. From September through April, the sometimes 100 mph northeast winds can roar down the Cajon Pass, stirring up dust and creating major problems. Says Baird: "We've had trucks blow over."

The seasonal Santa Anas cause concern, but Baird's main responsibility is fire hazard weed abatement. That's a year-round project, although the threat of fire is less during California's rainy winter season.

That rainy season means more work for the roadside weed control workers.

### Roadside control

Deputy commissioner Gardner is a relative newcomer to roadside control, having assumed the duty after a reorganization earlier this year. He's been with the San Bernadino agriculture department eight years—as a field aide, biologist, supervisory biologist (in pesticide use enforcement), and finally deputy commissioner. He earned the position in 1984.

Along the way he garnered experience in pesticide use enforcement but received little training in pesticide application.

He's taken a crash course in the last six months, at the same time trying to avoid the problems his department looks for. "We probably look into anywhere from one to 10 problems per week," says Gardner. That helps his workers while they are applying pesticides. They recognize a problem situation.

Among the herbicides used by department workers: amitrole, bromacil, diuron, diquat, glyphosate, simazine, and sulfometuron. Department workers are not using PGRs, but Gardner says they may in the future.

"Our workers know what they should be doing and the answers to most questions. Their education is continuous. They attend seminars and training sessions," he says.

All are college graduates (the county agriculture department hires only college grads for field and management positions), two are trained in pesticide use, and three are generalists. All are licensed pest control operators.

### Contract workers

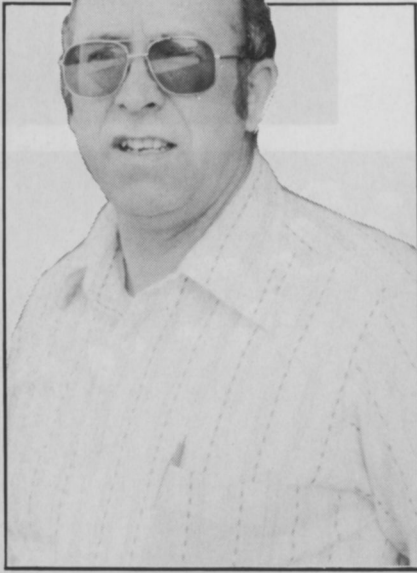
The weed control division of the county agriculture department operates mainly by performing work for the county's towns and cities, which in turn, repay the department for the services.

The payback system, common in California, works well, says Gardner. "We offer weed control as a service to the public and we do it at cost," he says.

The county owns four 1,000-gallon spray rigs, one 200-gallon rig, and one 50-gallon rig. "It's rare when we have all four large rigs running at one time," says Gardner.

San Bernadino County is not in the chemical storage business. Trucks returning at day's end with





Tom Baird (left), agriculture deputy commissioner, San Bernadino County, has been with the department since 1966. Fellow deputy commissioner John Gardner (right) fields a point of concern from "Holly" Hollingworth, operator of Hydrex Pest Control Co.



Bare ground next to a roadside is cause for joy in San Bernadino County. This road runs through Rancho Cucamonga.

chemicals still in the tanks are sent back out to spray until empty. "We have no intention of getting into the mass liquid storing business," Gardner promises.

Activity peaks during the winter season with pre-emergent work. The goal, says Gardner, is bare ground along the roadside. Application of pre-emergence herbicides continues into March and then post-emergent control begins.

The San Bernadino roadside weed control division is not involved with roadside landscape, says Gardner. Consequently, you won't see the complicated landscapes you see in neighboring Los Angeles or Orange counties.

The intersection of I-10 and I-215 in San Bernadino is being landscaped, says Gardner, but by a private company.

#### And after the weeds...

Weed control, an important function within the large county, is but a small part of the overall duties of the county agriculture department. Workers must be schooled in other areas.

Biologists must take an eight-part exam, including sections on pesticide use enforcement and weed control, to become state certified.

The other sections are plant quarantine and pest detection; nursery and seed regulations; insect and disease pest management; fruit, vegetable, and egg quality control; vertebrate pest management; and apiary regulations.

After passing all eight parts, an employee must then pass a management test if he or she wishes to become a deputy commissioner.

In San Bernadino County, four

deputy commissioners (Gardner and Baird, plus Rich Campana and Don Schreiber) answer to agriculture commissioner Roger Birdsall.

Ed Layaye serves an office management function as chief deputy commissioner. Some 40 employees staff the agriculture department.

Deputy commissioner Baird supervises 15 workers, including nine hazardous weed abatement officers.

After inspection, a weed abatement officer decides whether an area presents a hazard (90 percent of the of the time, the hazard is in the form of grass or weeds, says Baird). If so, the owner is informed and asked to remedy the situation.

If he doesn't, a private contractor is called in to clean the mess and a bill is sent to the owner. Some 24 contractors work for the county agriculture department.

If the owner doesn't comply, then he's subject to a fine. Most cases don't get that far, says Baird, a native of Meadville, Pa.

He still gets out to do some field work but lately the managing of the weed abatement division budget has cut his field time to 50 percent. That's enough for him.

"There's a lot of freedom in this job. I'm pretty much my own person and I enjoy that. The commissioner and assistant don't hover over you, they let you do your own thing," says Baird. **WT&T**