

ON THE R.O.W. AGAIN

With warmer weather, rights-of-way managers are getting back outside. They must cope with everything from managing roadside vegetation to managing their employees.

by Jeff Sobul, assistant editor



A LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT survey of roadside and rights-of-way vegetation managers reveals that, on the average, respondents manage 3,492 miles of roadside with an average of 73 full-time employees. And nearly all of the respondents will be mowing all or parts of those roadside turf areas to some extent during the year. The lucky ones will mow just once or twice, but many will be mowing up to once a week.

About 83 percent of the respondents will control weeds in some way. About 74 percent are also involved in tree maintenance. Two-thirds of the respondents will be seeding or sodding this year; 60 percent will be doing some form of erosion control or reclamation. Not surprisingly, only 31 percent will be irrigating their roadsides this year.

If it's not one thing...

...It's another. Roadside vegetation managers will be dealing with a myriad of problems, as they do every year. (One poor soul dealing with 42,000 miles of roadsides with just eight full-timers has problems "too numerous to mention," and he is trying "everything" to deal with them.)

The most common problem facing the managers is dealing with weeds and other vegetation. One such manager in the Midwest responds that he is "having a lot of trouble controlling Canadian thistle and leafy spurge." To solve it, he will probably "struggle, and after three plays, punt."

A regional landscape architect in the Northeast has a different problem: every year since 1957, his state has issued a herbicide manual, but applicators are still making decisions contrary to overall planning.

Yet another landscape supervisor doesn't have enough time for him and his four-man staff to spray his 1,500 miles of roadside. He is forced to spray early each season and work different hours to avoid wind problems and traffic in some areas.

Other problems arise from having improperly or untrained applicators. A number of respondents note that a training program is necessary.

PGRs spreading

One trend noticeable from this survey is related in one way or another to mowing. Sixty percent of survey participants from across the

country are using plant growth regulators either on an experimental basis or regularly, some as often as once a month.

One roadside manager in the Northwest is stepping up his application frequency in an attempt to eliminate mowing in two of his districts. While some are using PGRs to reduce mowing frequency, others are using it in areas inaccessible to mowers.

Many of the roadside managers see this increased use as a trend which will continue for a number of years at least. Another trend related to this, many participants note, is a need for better spray equipment. Respondents expect to see better calibrated equipment soon, as well as more effective, and more selective chemicals to put in them.

Unfortunately, one unlucky respondent, a public pesticide operator in the Northwest, could see no use for the new equipment because, he complains, "our county commissioners have just banned practically all spraying!"

For him, and the other roadside managers waiting for improvements, but who need help now, the following profiles may be of some assistance. **LM**