

Would ChemLawn, by any other name, still be ChemLawn? Stay tuned.

'EcoScape' tag is spanking new; owner by mid-year likely will be new, too.

■ The 1992 lawn care season will be business as usual for ChemLawn, except ChemLawn will:

- probably have a new owner;
- likely have a new name on the side of its trucks—"EcoScape by ChemLawn."
- attempt (again) to offer a more comprehensive package of lawn/landscape services.

Ecolab Inc., which bought ChemLawn in 1987, announced early this past March that it will sell most of its subsidiary and take a \$275 million fourth-quarter bath.

Ecolab's decision to put the "For Sale" sign on ChemLawn does not surprise many people in professional lawn care, or in the investment community, either.

Financial analysts say Ecolab spent too much for ChemLawn to begin with.

The St. Paul, Minn.-based maker of cleaning and sanitizing products paid about \$370 million for ChemLawn in 1987. This was about \$100 million more than Waste Management, Inc., the huge Chicago-based waste hauler, had initially offered in February 1987. (WM did, later, sweeten its offer.)

The Ecolab/ChemLawn marriage was not a good one.

As ChemLawn remained the most visible provider of professional lawn care, it likewise retained its uncomfortable role as lightning rod for anti-lawn-care, anti-pesticide criticism.

Moreover, the company's management changed substantially since lawn care's halcyon years in the early and middle 1980s.

But most significantly, sales stayed flat; ChemLawn couldn't add to Ecolab profits despite the synergy Ecolab felt would develop between the cleaning and sanitizing services it offers to commercial/institutional clients and lawn/landscape ser-

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vices. Competition is, if anything, as intense in big-acreage accounts as it is for home lawns, Ecolab discovered.

In 1989 ChemLawn showed a \$42.7 million operating loss (\$34 million from a one-time charge), and in 1990, with net sales of \$383.9, a \$2.45 million loss. *The Wall Street Journal* reported in March that ChemLawn will post a \$10-\$15 million loss for 1991.

Apparently in an effort to present a new face, this past February ChemLawn provided 140 company-owned and 50 franchisees with ads offering up EcoScape, a new name for an expanded lawn, tree and shrub service.

Many ChemLawn trucks got a new paint job too with the name EcoScape prominently displayed. The name, and the new service offerings it represents, will be introduced to the public through "slow, steady marketing," said a ChemLawn source.

ChemLawn seeks to boost sales of add-on lawn and landscape services; this while it preserves its position as the nation's most recognizable residential lawn care provider.

"Options range from landscape installation to controlling weeds in flower beds," said ChemLawn President David L. Siegfried. Lawn aeration, renovation, mulching and pruning: these are services of EcoScape too.

In mid-March, Siegfried also announced that ChemLawn's company-owned branches would offer an all natural organic fertilizer as an option in 1992. An organic-based program launched by ChemLawn during the 1991 growing season captured few people's attention, including customers.

According to Ecolab, the company hopes to have a buyer for ChemLawn by mid-year. Stuart Pulvirent, an analyst with Shearson Lehman Brothers, said the price tag would be somewhere in the neighborhood of \$100 million, reported *The Wall Street Journal*.

Pierson M. Grieve, Ecolab's chairman, president and chief executive officer, said that the divestiture of ChemLawn "focuses all our (Ecolab's) strategies on our strong world-wide cleaning and sanitizing business opportunities."

—Ron Hall

Green media is 'ho-hum' on environmental claims

Writers believe they should keep readers informed.

■ So, who believes the hype anyway? Not the media, or so it appears.

When 503 garden writers responded to a recent survey, only 14 percent were con-

vinced that products described as environmentally correct were what they claimed to be.

Furthermore, the respondents—all members of the Garden Writer's Association of America—split down the middle over the use of terms like "environmentally correct" or "environmentally friendly" to market products. Only 30 per-

cent approved the use of the term "environmentally preferred."

Nine out of 10 of the garden writers surveyed, however, said "yes" they did have a responsibility to inform their readers about environmental issues and water conservation.

The survey was conducted by Hinsdale Marketing Services, Oak Brook, Ill., on behalf of Aquapore Moisture Systems, Phoenix, Ariz. Aquapore, which manufactures soaker hose and other water-saving products, was not identified in the survey as the sponsor.