

## Judge: Massachusetts state law is enough regulation for one town

■ Licensed lawn applicators in Mansfield, Mass., *don't* have to put pink warning placards every 50 feet around the properties they treat there.

A superior court judge said they're already covered by regulations of the Massachusetts Pesticide Control Act.

The city reportedly will not appeal the judge's decision, reports the Massachusetts Association of Lawn Care Professionals (MALCP), whose members donated \$3,300 to oppose the regulations. Even so, the four companies involved in the dispute with Mansfield—ChemLawn, The Lawn Co., TruGreen, and Tuckahoe Lawn Care—reportedly spent about \$20,000 defending their right to do business in Mansfield.

In a related matter, MALCP reports it raised \$11,000 through a silent auction to work for passage of pre-emption legislation in the state. Participating contributors: Agriturf, BASF, Ciba-Geigy, DowElanco, Earth Gro, Hoeschst-Roussel, Lebanon Chemical Co., Partner's Quality Lawn Service, ProLawn, Rhone Poulenc, Riverdale Chemical, Sandoz, O. M. Scotts, and Tuckahoe Turf Farm.

## Illinois trio: herbicide use harms civil rights

■ Three residents of Hinsdale, Ill., claim that the village violated their civil rights by applying a herbicide on public properties last fall.

The three complainants, one of whom filed the claim on behalf of her 14-year-old son, are to meet with village officials this summer. The three claim they are "chemically sensitive" and suffered headaches, asthma and nausea after the application of Confront, a herbicide, to parks and grounds at the village hall and library. (Molitor Grounds Maintenance, Glen Ellyn, Ill., performed the work under contract to the village.)

Hinsdale officials deny that they violated anybody's civil rights. They say there's no evidence linking the herbicide with the illnesses.

If the complainants and the village don't reach a conciliation by mid-summer, the matter could end up in the lap of the Illinois Civil Rights Commission, reports the *Chicago Sun*.

# Proper software puts reins back into the LCO's hands

by Bill Wheeler

■ Almost every aspect of your life is touched by computers. Your alarm clock, digital watch, coffee maker, and car—all depend upon some form of computer technology. It has been more than a dozen years since the microcomputer started a virtual information revolution.

Yet, in this day and age, it still astounds me that some businesses refuse the benefits of automation. With scarce resources and increasing competition, the decision to ignore computerization is simply a bad move.

**Computers save time**—It's too easy to say "I don't have time to learn." But computers can save you time, by making certain tasks like payroll, routing and estimating easier and quicker. This means more billable time and, thus, more opportunity for profit.

In the lawn care industry, the use of a computer system is an absolute must if customer service orders are to be processed at optimum efficiency and if inventory is to be controlled at minimum levels. The faster an order is processed, the faster the customer receives his services, and the faster your money comes back.

Can you track and anticipate your customers' needs? The ability to do this will not only help you service your customers better, but keeps your orders coming in. A well-designed system will allow you to check customers' credit and inform you of current stocking level status while updating inventory levels and billing.

**Just-in-time ordering**—"Just-in-time" ordering will allow you to stock just enough turf management materials to keep your customer orders moving without overstocking inventory.

You can track your customers' ordering history, so that you can adjust your reorder demands. The ability to cross-reference similar items may make the difference between servicing a customer and

losing a sale. And, since many customers are discount sensitive, choose a system that can automatically compute discounts based on volume, price, frequency, or other criteria that you need.

Once those orders start moving out, tracking your late receivables makes a difference in lost interest and revenue. Many systems allow you to calculate early payment discounts. A consolidated bill or statement, even for multiple locations, makes it easier for your customers.

Billing will be more efficient and you can keep track of what's owed and how long it's been owed. This way you can easily identify preferred and slow-paying customers. And most software programs will print statements and even address the envelopes for you.

**Information routing**—For this, the system must be fully integrated, so that information entered into the system will be distributed in the entire system without

the need to re-enter the same information a second time. Some of the areas that will need special attention are order entry, inventory control, billing, payroll, and accounts receivable. All of these will have to be integrated with each other, and the final information must be passed on to your general ledger.

For larger operations, the system should be designed to allow for multiple operators and workstations.

With such a system, all data should be routed properly, so information is easily retrieved from the computer.

With the powerful fully-integrated accounting products on the market today, this type of system is available, and there is no need to custom program for a specific business.

With a well-designed system, users should be able to change screen descriptions, and also design custom reports without the assistance of computer experts.

It is also important to note that the basic terms of payroll, billing, or general

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ledger should not be misleading in evaluating a system.

Careful plans and patience will go a long way to set up a good system that will generate what you need.

Some general use software packages are designed exclusively with the green industry in mind.

A budget package may seem like a deal

at first, but will it keep pace with your business' growth? Choosing an expensive package seems to be a difficult choice, but look for features that relate to your specific business. Compare all the features as they relate to your business before you commit to a certain package. You do not have to make a life-long decision at the initial point of purchase.

The system should offer flexibility, so that it can adapt to your business, and also grow with the business.

Remember: this computer system is only a tool or equipment in your business, just like other pieces of equipment. It has a limited life and will most likely have to be replaced in several years.

**Dealers stress service**—In the early 1980s, computer dealers opened their doors and basically took orders for sales with little or no effort.

Experts who deal in the type of systems needed in lawn care have learned to speak the language of lawn care, have learned to solve the problems of lawn care and, in short, think in terms of lawn care.

—At the time this article was written, Bill Wheeler was marketing director for Armor Systems, Inc., of Maitland, Fla.

## PLCAA committee: more franchise, mom/pop shops

■ The number of professional lawn care companies will continue to grow even though it's going to be harder to enter the market. That's what the Strategic Planning Committee of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) thinks.

The committee predicts that:

- Lawn care franchises will increase in number.
- The number of personalized care and mom-and-pop operations will grow too.
- Companies will offer more add-on services to stabilize cash flow.
- Companies will offer more information to customers.
- The industry will face increasing regulation.
- LCOs will accept regulation, but not at the local level.
- Companies must find ways to keep good personnel.
- Natural (all organic) products will find a solid niche in the industry.
- Customers already expect service and quality. Increasingly they'll expect creativity.

The committee meets about once a year and is made up of application company owners/managers, supplier representatives, and members of the trade press. Although the its objective is to keep PLCAA pointed in the right direction, it also periodically rubs its crystal ball.

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