

LAWN CARE INDUSTRY

Cutting down pesticide use

Dr. Roger Funk urges green industry to consider concept of 'sustainable development' at N.A.A. management conference.

■ Some of the public mistrusts the green industry's pesticide use. These critics need to be reassured about the environmental benefits of the green industry's efforts.

That's where the concept known as "sustainable development" fits in. The beauty of this idea is that responsible green industry pros already practice many of its tenets. They just haven't tied them together into a package they can present to the public.

Roger Funk, vice president for human and technical resources for The Davey Tree Expert Company, Kent, Ohio, told an audi-

ence at the 1993 National Arborist Association Management Conference this past winter that sustainable development is "development we can live with."

Funk said sustainable development is actually a teeter-totter. Industry is on one side and the environment is on the other. They must be in balance for progress to occur.

"All we have to do is put a little bit more weight on the environment side," said Funk. "We don't have to take weight off the economic side...We don't have to turn backwards, and we don't want to turn backwards."

To build sustainable development into your business, said Funk:

● **Develop an environmental statement.**

"The whole idea now is to get the environment and the economy together and you can make your decisions on the two and not on one or the other," said Funk.

Funk's pesticide issues for the 1990s

1) Chemical trespass. The State of Michigan requires application companies to prepare a pesticide drift management plan. Other states may follow. Applicators (Dr. Funk addressed his remarks to arborists) will have to consider buffer zones, particle sizes, spray heights, alternative products, etc. to keep chemicals from drifting onto neighbors' properties.

2) Notification and posting. Several U.S. lawmakers want to take these regulations nationwide.

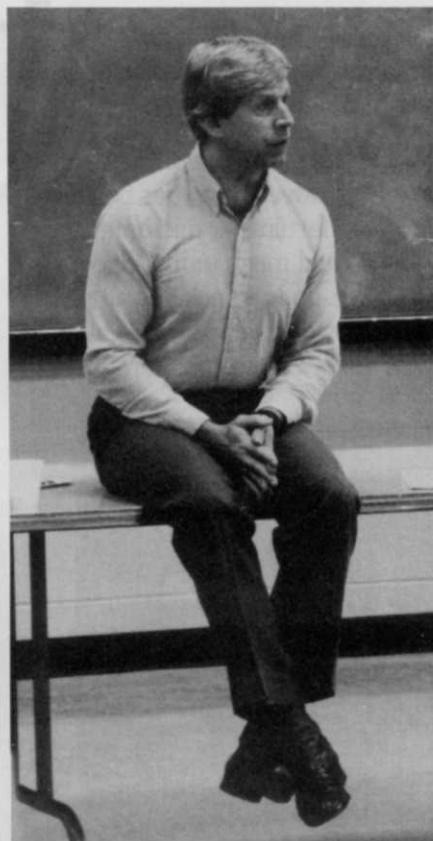
3) Multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS). No matter what industry thinks about MCS, some of the public and a small number of doctors are convinced it's real. "Since it has been given a name,

it now has legitimacy," says Funk. "And because it now 'exists', more people will come up with the symptoms."

4) Disclosure of inert ingredients. Arguing in the face of well-documented facts, some of the public's mistrust of chemicals is all-inclusive.

5) Criminal charges and/or prison terms for company management. New federal regulations can result in prison terms for managers as a result of actions by the company.

6) Designated rinse containment areas. Some states already require these areas. Others, because of fear of groundwater contamination, will probably require them also.



Dr. Roger Funk establish dialogues with customers and the public.

● **Improve environmental performance.** Select and plant the proper landscape materials with care and for appropriate sites. Provide the proper cultural care to improve plant vigor.

● **Establish a dialogue with customers/the public.** Funk asked: Do you survey your customers? Have you considered forming a community advisory panel to make suggestions for your company?

● **Strengthen your education efforts.** Consider how you can provide balancing

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views in the local school system. Provide video and/or text packs that explains your industry and its goals. Offer your services to a speaker's forum.

Davey Tree knows the power of perception—and of action. It's working to reduce its pesticide use in tree care even more than the 75 percent reduction it accomplished in the late 1980s. The company's rallying cry of "95 by '95" refers to its goal to cut pesticide use by 95 percent by 1995.

"We probably won't reach it, but we will

come close," said Funk.

For instance, Funk pointed out that tests show that chemical blow-through and chemical drippage on a tree with a 30-foot canopy can be reduced significantly by spraying no more than three gallons of material per minute at 70 psi.

Also, establishing tree application guidelines (rather than just relying on "spray to the point of runoff") would certainly cut the amount of pesticides used, he said.

Admirable as it is, a company's goal

shouldn't be merely to reduce chemical use. Goals need to be more positive, said Funk. Those goals focus on improving customer service, while reducing risk in providing that service.

"If people's perceptions are that we are the cause of pollution," Dr. Funk noted, "then, by introducing and promoting sustainable development, we will also be recognized as the people who solve the problems."

—Ron Hall

No single program for everybody

■ Thinking about offering an "environmentally sound" lawn care program? Start by asking yourself why. Hopefully, you'll come up with an answer.

"Sit down and write down your own thoughts and definitions of what turfgrass and the environment mean to you," advises Gerard "Rod" Ferrentino, Cornell University Cooperative Extension.

"Then, after you've implemented your program, revisit what you've written and enhance it periodically."

Ferrentino, an IPM specialist, feels the biggest reason why some lawn care professionals aren't successful in



Ferrentino: We are environmentalists

marketing "environmentally sound" lawn care is because they haven't identified the different types of customers they serve.

"It's very difficult to have one program that works for everybody," he told about 100 turfgrass managers at the 1993 Loft Seed Field Day.

Also, some LCOs assume that their clients already recognize the environmental benefits resulting from professional lawn care. Wrong.

"It's time to come out of the closet and tell your message that you work with the environment. You work with turfgrass. You work with trees," said Ferrentino.

"If that's not the ultimate environmentalist, I don't know what the heck is."

"Anybody who applies a pesticide should be able to tell the pest that it's targeted for, the life cycle of the pest, where the pest is in the lawn, and how severe the problem is," he said as an example.

—Ron Hall

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'Service them to death' (Maybe not that much...)

...but service is indeed one of the keys to the success of Hadco Lawn & Landscape, a big fish in a small pond.

■ Bartlesville, Oklahoma is a tiny town located 50 miles north of Tulsa.

The nation's first commercial oil well west of the Mississippi was drilled there, and every year the town hosts an International Mozart Festival. The town is the corporate headquarters for Phillips Petroleum, which is consequently its largest employer.

Bartlesville is also where you'll find Hadco Lawn & Landscape Management Company, which—for purposes of this story, anyway—is Bartlesville's greatest success story.

Wes Hadsell, 34, is president and founder of the 11-year-old company, which has established a definite presence in this town of 38,000 people.

Eighty percent of Hadco's revenue is generated by city contracts and Phillips Petroleum. The other 20 percent comes from residential accounts. It's the city's first and largest landscape/maintenance company.

Hadco "does it all," says Hadsell: irrigation, hardscaping, excavation, to the recently-added lighting installation.

A self-taught landscape designer, Hadsell draws out the plans for all designs.

Hadsell says he could easily expand to other towns; Coffeyville and Independence are two nearby Kansas cities in need of lawn care services, but Hadsell says he'd avoid expanding there for peace of mind. "It would drive me nuts not knowing how

to different situations, and are good problem solvers, like when it comes to modifying a pickup truck design (see related story, page xx).

Industry spokesman—Hadsell is an active industry supporter. He often speaks to civic organizations. A recent speech covered the importance of returning clippings to turf. He attempted to start a local lawn care association, but says the idea didn't spark enough interest. His concerns include a desire to see mandatory licensing among landscape contractors.

Hadsell started in landscape management by chance. He was in college, working about 32 hours a week for Phillips as a computer assistant. His wife, Cindy, worked at a savings and loan. The chairman of the bank needed someone to tend the grounds around his home. Wes offered to help with what he thought was a one-time favor. Soon he was mowing for a number of bank executives.

Hadsell didn't need his college degree to recognize the need for a high quality landscape management company, and soon Hadco was up and running. He bought some mowers on credit, hired one man to assist, and was on his way.

There are 15 year-round employees, about 35 during peak season.

—Terry McIver

Hadco highlights

- ✓ No smoking on the job.
- ✓ Safety meetings are held regularly.
- ✓ Crew manager makes daily site checks.
- ✓ Uniforms required. Trucks always clean.
- ✓ Profit-sharing plan for employees.
- ✓ Spot inspections by Wes Hadsell weekly.
- ✓ For ornamentals, a "pinch and prune" crew is led by a trained horticulturist.
- ✓ Mowing crews mow, trim and edge.
- ✓ 'Winter rules:' "We pull together and do what it takes to get the job done," with a smaller crew, says Hadsell.
- ✓ Service tip: Use equipment to the fullest. 'When putting in an irrigation system, why not take advantage of what you have on hand (trencher, manpower) and make a pitch for a lighting system?'

☆☆☆☆ Company philosophy: 'Service!'

everything looks," he says.

Hadsell's employees are jacks of all trades, but are by no means unskilled. He says he prefers to hire persons with a variety of hands-on experience in vocational trades, like auto body work, masonry, or other trades. They work hard, can adapt



Hadco strives to give customers a sense of pride in their surroundings.



Modified truck a work and money saver

Out of necessity came an invention.

One of Wes Hadsell's borrowed ideas is a pickup truck he modified with a fold down hydraulic tail gate.

"While at a trade show several years ago, I saw a truck bed which really appealed to me," Hadsell recalls. "It sat on a truck frame and looked like a trailer, but the back five feet sloped down close to the ground, which would create a problem dragging in driveways. Hadsell modified the idea, and enlisted the help of a welder he knew. He realized the design would eliminate problems that can occur when pulling and backing trailers: jack knifing, broken lights, bent axles, flat tires, vehicle license fees.

He and the crew modified a 1991 Isuzu overhead cab truck to come close to the



Modifications to this Isuzu truck make it easy to reach equipment and load cargo. Built-in fuel tanks for equipment eliminate gas can clutter.

"The best feature about this bed is the fold down hydraulic tail. This allows us to load comfortably and safely, but to ride level while in transit."

original. They now have two.

"We were tremendously happy with the finished product," says Hadsell. This past winter he modified another truck, with an added design change, to allow for easy crew access.

"We use these trucks for landscaping, and need the ability to put pallets of mulch, peat moss, trees over the side," Hadsell explains. "We therefore designed the fold down side boards. The best feature about this bed is the fold down hydraulic tail. This allows us to load comfortably and safely, but to ride level while in transit."

The trailers hydraulic cams are from a Jacobsen fairway mower. Smaller, hand-held equipment, like blowers and trimmers, is stored up front, within easy reach. Built-in fuel tanks for equipment eliminate the need for extra gas cans. Diesel fuel and gasoline are in separate tanks equipped with filters and clear viewers to check fuel level.

"The real value (of the trucks) is that they make our crews more efficient," Hadsell says.

—Terry McIver

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Tips for a killer company newsletter

The biggest failing for company newsletters is poor presentation, not the content.

■ If you're going to give your lawn/landscape customers a newsletter, give them a dynamite newsletter.

If you do, you'll accomplish something that even the nation's biggest and best service companies don't often do so well, says Flint Whitlock, who has both produced and judged award-winning newsletters.

In fact, size has little to do with grabbing your customers' attention with newsletters. But, just like the service you provide, your printed material must project an image of quality and be appropriate.

"If your newsletter is well produced in all its aspects, then people will assume your company does quality work. If it's poorly written, designed and printed, people are going to have a negative impression of your firm," says Whitlock, owner of Flint Whitlock Creative, Denver, Colo.

One of Whitlock's clients is The Swingle Tree Co. in Denver whose six-page newsletters are considered among the best in the green industry.

Suggests Whitlock:

✓ Find an appropriate name for your newsletter. Display it in the masthead which fills up about 1/3 of the cover page.

✓ Initially you can start with a single sheet of 8 1/2 X 11" paper, printed on both sides, or 11 X 17" which, when folded, makes four pages.

✓ There is space on each page for at least two or three short articles.

✓ Vary the size of headlines.

✓ Design at least one photograph, illustration, chart, graph, etc. onto each page. It should clarify or amplify information on that page.

✓ Determine how much space you want to devote to selling, special offers, coupons, etc.; how much space to customer information and education.

✓ Write in an easy-to-understand, conversational style. Don't be too technical.

✓ Don't forget to put your company name, address and phone number in each issue.

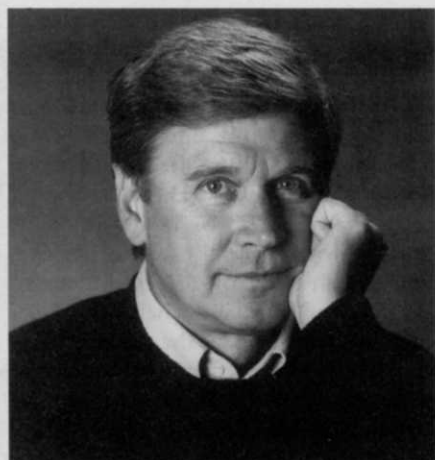
Material for your newsletter might

include: a question-and-answer column, success stories (some of your own if you can do it tastefully), how-to stories, even cartoons if they're appropriate. Keep asking your field and office staffs for suggestions.

The biggest failing of industry newsletters is poor presentation, says Whitlock, even when the information they contain is first rate.

"All the hard work in putting your newsletter together can go down the drain if the appearance of the newsletter turns people off," says Whitlock, who suggests the help of a someone who knows page layout and design.

—Ron Hall



Whitlock: 'Don't dazzle customers with your technical knowledge.'