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to the eventual owner of that property."

But some landscape pros have neither the expertise nor the resources to bid such ambitious projects. Also, some contractors don't offer maintenance services.

It's no wonder that they can feel caught in the middle—sometimes implementing a design that isn't their own, then relying upon the property owner, or another contractor, to maintain the integrity of their installation, at least through the warranty period.

Even so, landscape warranties, whatever their particulars, are almost as common as landscape companies.

Warranties offer protection for property owners. They may also indicate that the contractor is confident of his/her service. But, most importantly, they allow the contractor to compete in the marketplace.

There are complications though, although few probably as clear-cut as these examples:

- The new landscape that isn't watered for three weeks because the property owner went on vacation.
- The freshly planted evergreens that turn brown because the family collie finds it a convenient place to urinate.
- The young tree girdled by the dog chain wrapped around it.

Typical is the warranty offered by Patrick McGrady's Pro Green of New Castle, Ind.: one year on plant material. A longer warranty can be arranged if Pro Green maintains the property, too.

Environmental Design's Joel Lerner: Why shouldn't the customer have the option of buying an extended warranty?



"We have to use some judgement," cautions McGrady. "We have to look at the job itself. For instance, if it's a nice-sized job and it's a valuable client, we don't ask a lot of questions. We just take care of it."

Deanna Walker of Turf Tenders, Bellingham, Wash., says her firm guarantees their plantings for one growing season. "We will give an added warranty if we maintain it for a full year," she says, adding that seasonal, or one-year free replacement is "pretty typical" in her marketplace.

A new idea—But Joel Lerner, president of Environmental Design, Chevy Chase, Md., wonders why a warranty can't also become an additional profit center for a contractor.

He says he's considering developing "an extended warranty" plan similar, in purpose anyway, to those offered by auto or appliance dealers.

The landscape contractor, most simply explained, calculates the cost of the "extended warranty" into the original cost of the project, and presents it to the potential client as an option.

"What if we offer an extended warranty and on the warranty we stipulate that we'll do site inspections on a scheduled basis. And we'll provide the customer with plant condition reports," says Lerner. "Maybe on this warranty we can write in a plant replacement clause to."

Clients buying an extended warranty afford the contractor the opportunity to stay in touch with them.

"I think it would indicate to the client that we want to see this property as much as we can to make sure everything is right," adds Lerner.

"Why not?," says Greg Carlson of Carlson Landscaping, Duluth, Minn. "Extended warranties are done for just about everything else."

Even so, his warranty remains similar to most others in his northern Minnesota market, one year on plants and related services.

"You have to say that you'll stand behind your work, then honor that. Otherwise you'll never get a job," Carlson says.

Most contractors, in fact, agree that a long-term warranty program will work—as long as they're getting paid for it.

—Ron Hall

Fighting weeds...and fires, too?

Lawn care technicians find that volunteering for the local fire department is a rewarding avocation.

■ What does Curb Appeal, a professional lawn care company, and the Stafford, Va., volunteer fire department have in common?

They're staffed by some of the same people, including Curb Appeal owner Charlie Robertson, a 20-year fire department veteran.

This spring marks the fourth year in
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'We work our jobs on a contractual basis,' says Charlie Robertson.

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business for Robertson and his lawn care company. In addition to Robertson, Curb Appeal consists of 7 to 10 part-time employees. All, with just two exceptions, are also volunteer fire fighters.

One of the exceptions is a county deputy sheriff. The other is a local high school senior that Robertson selects each season to learn the business. Last year's student employee is in college and now a volunteer fire fighter also.

Curb Appeal provides mowing, pruning, mulching and light installation and other maintenance services in central and northern

Stafford County, a county of about 75,000 people. It's located on the north side of the Rappahannock River from Fredericksburg, and about 30 miles south of Washington D.C.

The area is rich in history. George Washington's boyhood home is nearby, along with sites of important Civil War battles. But, it's not too rich to live in. In fact, Stafford has become one of the communities of choice for career firefighters from larger communities in the northern Virginia/Washington metropolitan area.

The need is there—Robertson says as the community grew and became more prosperous, so did its need for a top-notch lawn care provider.

"There is an abundance of gypsy mowers and individuals out here with a pickup truck, weedeater, and blower. They have little or no background in the business,"

says Robertson.

The unique schedules of career fire fighters allows Curb Appeal to fill this growing demand for reliable lawn care services.

"The fire fighters and law enforcement personnel make excellent employees," says

Robertson. The unique schedules of career fire fighters allows Curb Appeal to fill this growing demand for reliable lawn care services. "The fire fighters and law enforcement personnel make excellent employees," says Robertson. The fire burned eight acres of woods and two storage sheds but was contained before it reached three large homes. Fire fighters were at the site for three hours. There were no injuries.



Fire fighters and law enforcement personnel already know how to deal with clients.

Robertson. "They're highly responsible. They know how to deal especially well with clients. They know how to work with and, in many instances, repair the equipment on the job site.

"They take pride in their appearance and project an exceptional image for the company."

What happens when Curb Appeal technicians get an emergency call that they must answer?

They secure the equipment, head for the fire station, get on the apparatus and respond, explains Robertson. When they're finished with the emergency, they put the fire fighting equipment back in service, then return to finish the lawn maintenance task.

Ready for action—For example, last fall Robertson and three other technicians were pruning trees at the county government

reached three large homes. Fire fighters were at the site for three hours. There were no injuries. The technicians don't respond to every call. Some calls, by their nature, are routine and handled by other volunteers, says Robertson.

But, when they're needed, they respond to emergencies whether it's an infant locked in a car or the freeing of a trapped accident victim.

"Our clients are understanding," says Robertson. "We work our jobs on a contractual basis, not by hourly rates."

It's not uncommon on a work day to see Curb Appeal respond to an emergency still dressed in their Curb Appeal shirts and baseball caps, says Robertson.

—Ron Hall

New, bright colors for a new season

With so many ornamental varieties on the market, it's easy to give commercial properties a completely new look every season.

■ Seasonal color displays can make a commercial development stand apart from all others.

Perimeter Center, a 400-acre suburban office and retail complex in north central Atlanta, demonstrates how color can be changed each season for a new look. Vibrant color combinations in mass plantings and the use of a central color theme give the Perimeter Center landscape its vitality and eye appeal.

Each year new varieties renew interest

in the landscape.

The fall flower varieties are more limited, primarily, pansies, violas, parsley; thyme; mustard; kale; snapdragons and bulbs.

In plain view—Since flower color draws attention, the location of the beds on the property is also important.

Most of the beds at Perimeter Center are located in prominent areas along the main drive, at the base of pylons that mark

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