

It seems like just a few short months ago that we were heralding the 1990s as the "Decade of the Environment" on these pages. In reality, it was three or four years ago that every article, every column we wrote, it seemed, pertained to how the green industry could implement more "environmentally-friendly" golf and landscape maintenance.

Whatever happened, we asked ourselves last week, to the "Decade of the Environment," then?

Well, folks...the obvious answer is that it got lost. It got lost in the hallowed halls of Congress

first, and then—most recently—it got lost in the White House during the great "Battle for the Budget" being waged between the executive and legislative branches of our sluggish federal government.

We asked ourselves whether the "Decade of the Environment" will ever be re-discovered by our leaders. And, remembering a *USA Today* article, we thought probably

not—at least not into the foreseeable future.

That article to which I refer ran on the front page of the January 8th issue. It listed the top 15 concerns of the voting public.

Nowhere among those concerns—indeed, nowhere in the entire lengthy article—was the environment ever mentioned.

To refresh your memory, here are the public's top concerns as we begin 1996, and what percentage voiced them, according to the *USA Today*/Gallup poll:

- 1) quality of public education (67%)
- 2) crime (66%)
- 3) the economy (64%)
- 4) jobs (63%)
- 4) availability of health coverage (63%)
- 4) cost of health care (63%)

- 7) budget deficit (58%)
- 7) drug abuse (58%)
- 7) financial security for retirees (58%)
- 10) Medicare (55%)
- 10) moral values (55%)
- 12) poverty (51%)
- 12) federal taxes (51%)
- 14) welfare (49%)
- 15) college costs (43%)

Latest word out of Washington seems to indicate that, if the Republicans win the budget battle, the EPA will face cuts of \$1 billion, meaning up to 50 percent less enforcement of its rules and regulations. Even if Pres. Clinton and his liberal cronies get their way about the budget, the EPA will reportedly face some cuts.

Either way, the EPA is gearing its internal organization to become more of an information and training source than an enforcement agency.

It's no secret, then, that the government is planning to put environmental issues on the backburner because of a change in public priorities.

This is good news for the green industry, because it doesn't appear that you will be subject to any new reporting requirements in the near future. You also probably won't face as many possible inspections.

But this turn of events could also be bad news for the green industry, if you let it be.

Because from now on, the government won't be looking over your shoulder and holding your hands at every juncture. Which means that the safety of the environment now rests on your shoulders alone.

Even though our politicians have lost the concept of the "Decade of the Environment," the green industry still has the power to keep it alive.

So please continue to watch what you're doing to the environment. Watch how you're doing it. And, when you're given this new responsibility, please don't take undue advantage it.

Or—just as sure as the sun will rise tomorrow morning—"the environment" will again leap to the top of public concerns and the government will slowly begin anew taking away our privileges, one by one. **LM**

What ever happened to 'Decade of the Environment?'



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