



## VEGETATION MANAGEMENT DOESN'T END IN WINTER WEATHER

Winter weather means you can finally stop worrying about vegetation control and focus municipal efforts on snow removal and winter maintenance. **Right? Wrong!**

### Inspection Suggestions

What colder temperatures do mean is that, in addition to snow removal and winter maintenance tasks, you should now shift your vegetation control activities to inspection, risk management, equipment checks, land clearing, mowing, cleanup, and even some winter spraying. Early winter is an excellent time to assess vegetation areas and determine the strengths and weaknesses of the past year's management program. First determine the criteria for judging the health and appearance of vegetation. You may want to set specific standards and compare them to what you wanted to accomplish in the past year. For example:



- **Safety.** Did you eliminate all sight distance issues and low overhanging vegetation?
- **Appearance.** Has your vegetation program resulted in good roadside appearance? Is dead vegetation piled away from roadways to minimize the danger of fires and any hindrance to winter operations and drainage?
- **Weeds.** What is the ration of weeds to desirable vegetation? Have new plant species taken root in your rights-of-ways?
- **Mowing.** Has vegetation been cut to proper height to maintain optimal plant health? Or has it been scalped, generally mowed too short, or allowed to grow too tall? Have sharp mower blades minimized torn and tattered vegetation?
- **Soil.** Have you tested soil to determine if specific nutrients or amendments are needed to improve the growing conditions?

### Planning for Improvement

Following inspection and evaluations, municipalities should start scheduling actions for improving their vegetation control programs. If a total renovation is needed, consider having workers spray this winter with a nonselective herbicide to kill existing weeds. Remember that municipalities are required to use certified sprayers. If you are planning on seeding, keep in mind that seeding in fall rather than spring reaps more success because the soil is warmer, the evenings are cooler, and there is more moisture so that seeds germinate more quickly. Also, since many annual weeds die with the first frost, seeds face less competition for nutrients, sunlight, and moisture. Check the calendar before seeding to make sure that it is not too late in the season. A good rule is to seed 45 days before the average date of the first frost. If you're looking for an early "green up" next spring, then consider applying an early winter fertilization.

When implementing selective weed control, try to schedule it for those times when the weeds are growing. If this step occurs too late in the winter and plants are hardened, the control will be ineffective.

### Personnel Issues

Use the down time in winter, when demanding summer workloads and leaf collection duties are completed, to valuate staff and staffing needs. Municipalities should encourage employees to set goals for personal and professional growth. This is a good time for them to sign up for training classes.

### Equipment and Supply Checks

Workers should inspect and repair equipment including mowers, tractors, booms, spreaders, sprayers, aerators, seeders, and even irrigation systems. Early winter months allow time for repairing equipment or researching new purchases. Also use this time to clean up old or stored chemicals. When handling, applying, and storing pesticides, always abide by these four words: **Always Read the Label.**