

A Professional Herbicide Applicator's View, On What It Means To Be A "Professional"

By Lee Atkins

To be a professional at any endeavor requires conditioning and advancement of skills to the point that one is recognized by his peers in his profession. This is true in athletics as well as business.

The nature of professionalism requires that the field of competition narrows as the profession is perfected. The result is a limited few that excel at what they do.

Early man, during the stone-age, recognized that their survival increased in the division of work along the lines of one's innate talents. Hence, every village had a tool maker, the flint-knapper.

Today, in the field of vegetation management, professionalism is attainable by a select group of "flint-knappers" or tool makers. By making business decisions that lead to excellence in their service they are recognized by professional organizations. One such tool is a program, **Quality Vegetation Management (QVM)**, initiated by the chemical manufacturer, BASF.

In order to become a QVM professional applicator, the professional herbicide applicator must commit and adhere to seven principles and practices:

- **Restore and improve plant, animal and human habitats –**

It is always the objective of any herbicide program to make improvements to habitat. That could be enhancing food crop quality, or enhancing grazing for livestock or wildlife. It is important to also improve line-of-sight vision for safety, reliability of services or aesthetics of public places.

- **Seek out and support professional certification and technical training**

Professional applicators are required by law to receive technical training and pass a state certification exam. While this is the basis for a legal license to perform work for hire, it is far short of qualifying as a professional. Herbicide manufacturers have professional programs based on quality of work, mitigation of problems and continuing education. Professional applicators routinely improve their workforce by training, testing and attending seminars and field tours.

- **Strive to always make a positive environmental change**

The decision of a professional applicator should always be to "do no harm" to the environment. The objective should be to use the least intrusive methodology and the least persistent herbicide. Selectivity of native plants, that do not interfere with the overall objective, should be considered. The idea should be to make inputs, by the use of selective herbicides, that results in a natural vegetation climax condition that is stable and self-sustaining. The establishment and adherence to Best Management Practices (BMPs), to this end, is an indication of a professional applicator.

- **Apply herbicide responsibly, using the appropriate amount to achieve the desired results**

From the knowledge and experience of the best suited herbicide, the professional applicator will know the minimum dosage to achieve the desired result. He will also know of alternatives should there be a

conflict with compatibility or objectives. A professional applicator will recommend several herbicide solutions in his proposal. Beware of those with the magic bullet! There are none.

- **Protect threatened and endangered species**

Recognition and alteration of methodology and the herbicide mix in sensitive areas is the hallmark of a true professional herbicide applicator. He will not only know that a change is needed, he will be capable and prepared to make it. Ironically, threatened and endangered species require very specialized habitats and the selective use of herbicides is often the only cost-effective way to enhance it.

- **Support industry research and development**

New products, tank-mixes and delivery systems are the ammunition in the battle with difficult species. The nature of pest control is to shift the species from easily controlled species to those that are difficult or resistant. An applicator that is not cognizant of this natural trend is asking for trouble. Usually, the appearance of herbicide resistant species is the first indication of an herbicide program lacking in professional oversight.

- **Follow label recommendations**

The axiom “if a little is good, then a lot must be excellent” is not pertinent to herbicide applications. There is a peak at which an herbicide’s useful activity is recognized. Once it is reached, there is potential harm to the environment and a likely selection for herbicide resistant bio-types, leading to genetic resistance.

The manufacturer has spent millions of dollars to establish the recommendations on their respective product labels. For those species indicated, the peak of performance is the highest labeled rate. A professional applicator will be properly calibrated, checking himself often, and hit the labeled target rate 100% of the time. Most complaints of non-performance are evidence of lack of professionalism by under application or miss-prescription.

Although the certification of professional applicators was envisioned by marketers, it is more than that. QVM was designed by a roundtable of ten (10) professional applicators, from the entire U.S., recognized within their particular discipline and region. By brain-storming and refinement of ideas, the elements of a professional applicator were borne out of this collective wisdom and experience of these professionals.

It is a program that has developed its own legs and has outgrown its original intent. It is not limited by region, discipline or resource.

QVM has become the mantra of those that strive for excellence in Professional Herbicide Application!