

TURF Surveys Industry During COVID-19




Source: www.TurfMagazine.com

Last week, the TURF team surveyed our email subscribers to discover how the current COVID-19 situation was affecting business operators in the lawn care and landscape industry. Here is a summary of the data gathered from the 500 responses to the survey.

The vast majority of respondents were lawn care operators and landscape contractors, but we also heard from a sampling of custom chemical applicators, irrigation contractors, tree services/arborists, golf courses managers, and facility management at commercial and education properties.

Industry Still In Motion

The majority of survey respondents (65%) work in a state (or states) where business had not been shut down. And nearly 10% operate in states where directives were continuing to evolve. 71% of respondents work on both commercial and residential properties, with 20% indicating residential only work. (In some good news today for the industry, Michigan's Gov. Whitmer signed Executive Order 2020-59 (COVID-19), which allows for lawn care and landscapers to get back to work in the state. While EO 2020-59 extends the "Stay Home, Stay Safe" order through May 15, it lifts "some restrictions on outdoor activities and allow some workers who perform previously suspended activities to go back to work.")

Results of the survey were split on how much of an impact the crisis is having on business – 37% of respondents have seen a major impact, 43% have experienced a slight impact, while 21% of respondents have not seen an impact on their business.

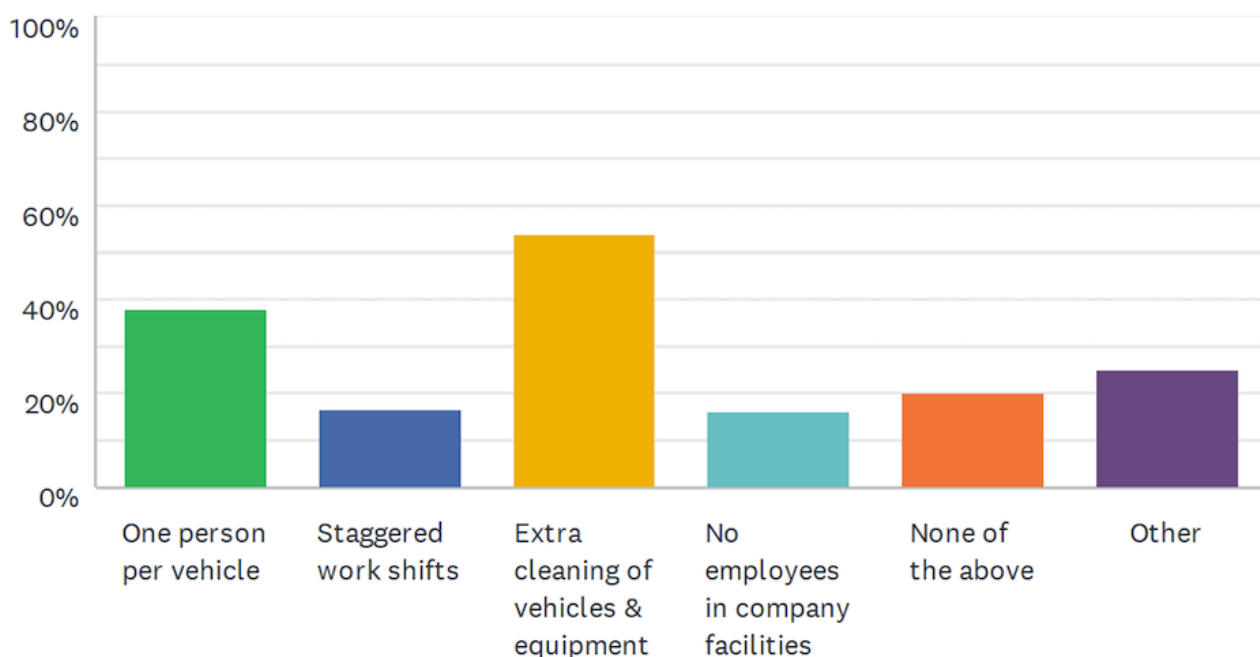
Specific to client cancellations, almost 50% are experiencing more cancellations compared to this time last season, with another nearly 50% seeing no difference. Cancellations have come from residential clients (45%), and 15% indicated cancellations from commercial clients.

When it comes to employees, 71% of the survey respondents had not had to let staff go during this crisis. Meanwhile, 29% have had to let staff go. It's worth noting that many respondents shared in additional comments that they are a one-person operation or a family business, so that figures into that 71% majority that have not downsized staff.

Health And Safety Measures

In this industry, social distancing between worker and customer is not the biggest challenge faced while work is performed on a residential or commercial property. Previous to COVID-19, business owners and their employees have interacted face to face with customers when needed – discussing expanded services, scheduling, or payment, for instance. Fortunately, in these times these issues can be handled over the phone or through automated processes (such as e-mail or software systems).

Concerns about employee-to-employee contact is a more prevalent issue, and survey respondents shared insight on their practices to minimize contact and keep people safe. In a question where respondents could choose all that apply, the results to the survey choices were – extra cleaning of vehicles and equipment (54%); one person per vehicle (38%); staggered work shifts (17%); and no employees inside company facilities (16%). Respondents were given the opportunity to share other measures they've put into place in their work, and many stated implementing the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) for employees. As is required in many jurisdictions currently, employees are instructed to wear masks and gloves throughout their shifts. And, some indicated they are providing hand sanitizer to employees. One owner mentioned he installed portable hand washing stations in each of his vehicles.



The TURF survey asked: What changes, if any, have you made to protect employees? Choose all that apply. (Source: Turf magazine, April 2020)

Comments And Conversation

The TURF survey asked respondents to share additional comments about the state of their businesses and thoughts on the direction of the lawn care and landscape industry overall, post COVID-19. There were many who expressed concern about how successful this season will be for them. Other comments included (edited for length and clarity):

- Customers are glad to see us as we can help to give them a home that is comforting to them at this time.*
- Thankfully, I haven't seen much of a downturn since the pandemic. I work by myself, have initiated limited contact, and most people I work for have been with me for 10+years. They are retired age and I'm really not concerned with losing any of them in this economic downturn*
- We are only a two person business, so are less impacted by distancing than large organizations. Once MN let us get out and work, it was pretty much business as usual. One exception may be riding in separate trucks instead of together.*
- Commercial work is steady. It's homeowners and employees not wanting to take chance. Will be hiring five more employees soon*
- The challenge has been scheduling and trying to stay on schedule and the extra time and money we are spending on purchasing safety equipment and cleaning solutions as well as making sure the men stay separated. We have put in place cleaning of all our trucks and equipment daily and putting names on equipment to ensure only that employee is the one touching that piece of equipment. We have also taken the Governor's Executive Order one step further and are only allowing two men on a job site (versus five men allowable) especially on small residential properties. We have also decided to not perform any major planting work or drainage work as this would put men working to close to one another. We are getting new work (thankfully). Also trying to keep the employees' spirits up! We have implemented that at least one man and sometimes two men per week either stay home on Mondays or on Fridays to be with their families. Employees are paid in full for these days off.*
- A lot of equipment and products I buy for my business are not always in stock. Sometimes, I'll have to wait a couple of weeks to get products shipped out that are back ordered.*
- Overall, COVID-19 has not been terribly disruptive to my business. My work is outside and I am generally able to social distance without much problem. The grass is still growing!*

As we continue to adjust to the current and future scenarios, it's evident members of TURF and the industry overall are experiencing varying levels of disruption to their businesses. Staying informed and taking advantage of resources available from government, associations and publications, and

suppliers can help to navigate the challenges and opportunities ahead.

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To read more coverage from *Turf* on the impact of COVID-19, [visit this page](#).