

GROWING PROFITS AND CUTTING COSTS

Propane-Powered Mowers Deliver Benefits Beyond Initial Expectations for St-Louis Area Landscape Contractor

AT A GLANCE

INDUSTRY Landscaping

COMPANY



St. Louis, Missouri

BENEFITS OF PROPANE

- Cost savings
- Environmental impact

Ideal Landscape Group did not have a typical introduction to propane-powered mowers. While many landscape companies initially find their way to propane due to expected cost savings or the positive environmental impact, Ideal first turned to propane in an attempt to avoid replacing a mower.

Located in St. Louis, Ideal has provided commercial landscaping, maintenance and irrigation for nearly 26 years. Landscape Maintenance Division Manager Tim Kircher tells of learning about propane-powered mowers: "We were first turned onto the idea at the 2010 Green Industry and Equipment Expo (GIE+EXPO) in Louisville, Kentucky. In studying up on it after the show, we realized that a propane conversion kit might be just what we needed to ease an engine flooding problem we'd been fighting on one mower. We needed to either get that problem fixed or replace the mower. So that conversion kit was our first propane mower purchase."



The Ideal monument sign makes a nice backdrop for one of their propane mowers.

Converting the Fleet

The configuration of the propane conversion kit on the mower solved Ideal's immediate need, but also opened their eyes to other propane-powered mower benefits. "That got the ball rolling", said Kircher. "We were so pleased by the initial performance, ease-of-use, and cost savings on that first mower that we quickly moved forward to do 9 or 10 more conversions that first year."

Onyx Environmental Solutions was the manufacturer of Ideal's conversion kit of choice, according to Kircher: "We do all of our own conversions. We tried out other brands, but we've just had great success with Onyx."

With about 20% of their 48-mower fleet running propane, Kircher said obtaining a 1000 gallon bulk tank was the next step in simplifying the system, and allowed them to realize greater cost savings. "Ferrellgas here in town was very helpful when we approached them. They hadn't done much work with landscape contractors at the time, but they were aggressive in getting us set up correctly. They really made it an easy process to put in a filling station, and as a result, we've seen our fuel costs decreased by about fifty percent." In an industry where fuel and manpower are the two biggest expenses, that can amount to real savings.

With no surprises during that first season, Ideal was anxious to convert the rest of their fleet going into the 2012 season. "We've got Ferris walk-behinds, Hustler riders, and Toro stand-on mowers, and all of them now run propane," says Kircher. "I believe we're the only larger landscape company in the area that runs 100% propane-powered mowers."

Adding Up Savings

Beyond fuel savings, Kircher can quickly list off several other cost-saving benefits they have realized. Ideal has gone more than two years with no fuel-related breakdowns or fuel contamination on the propane mowers, there's no need to carry bulk fuel on crew trucks, and the need for scheduled periodic maintenance has been reduced considerably. "Our oil changes have been cut in half. We're doing it twice yearly now instead of 4-5 times. Even then, the oil still looks like new. We could probably go all year without a change," said Kircher. "We're also replacing spark plugs just once each year, so our maintenance costs have dropped as well." Less time in the shop translates into more time in the field – a double victory.

Expanding Awareness

While Ideal appreciates propane's eco-friendly features, Kircher admits that many of their clients have yet to recognize the positive environmental impact of propane-powered mowers. "I think the awareness level will be much higher in five years... maybe less." With results like the ones experienced by the Ideal Landscape Group, Kircher says there's little doubt that other landscape contractors will catch on to propane much sooner.

CLEAN AWARD WINNER – For their use of propane-powered equipment to replace gasoline or diesel fuel consumption, Ideal Landscape Group received one of the five statewide Missouri Propane Education and Research Council (MO-PERC) 2012 CLEAN Awards – **Community Leadership in Environmental Awareness Now.**



A close-up look at one of Ideal's mowers.

About MO-PERC

The Missouri Propane Education and Research Council (MO-PERC) is a not-for-profit organization authorized by the Missouri legislature to promote industry education, public safety and consumer awareness of propane.