

November 17, 2020

TO: Mayor Kelly Girtz
Copy: Commissioners:
Patrick Davenport
Mariah Parker
Melissa Link
Allison Wright
Tim Denson
Russell Edwards
Andy Herod
Ovita Thornton
Mike Hamby

From: [Larry Will](#)¹



Reference:

<https://www.onlineathens.com/news/20201110/athens-considering-leaf-blower-regulations-to-reduce-noise-pollution-concerns>²

Dear Mayor Girtz:

I see as a first step; you have assigned the issue of regulating leaf blowers in Athens to your legislative review committee. That is a good thing, provided their recommendation is based on facts and not just innuendo, opinion, and related complaints. One such fact is that there are always two sides to any story and as usual, only one side is represented in the push to ban leaf blowers. The referenced

article deals with why leaf blowers should be banned, but does no fact checking of the claims made and ignores what the resultant problems might be. Commissioner Russell Edwards appears to be a supporter of a blower ban, but if he represents the present mindset of the Commission, someone should offer to help him verify that which he has been led to believe regarding leaf blowers. I know that there is implausibility in these arguments because for over 25 years I have worked with more than [190 cities and states](#)³ regarding leaf blowers and on their behalf, I have studied these claims in detail.

I am a former Vice President of Engineering for Echo Inc., a leading manufacturer of powered handheld lawn care products. I am not a stakeholder in your community nor am I trying to interfere with any decision you deem necessary, but your ultimate decision should be based on facts. I am a reputable source of information about leaf blower design and the use of both cordless and gasoline powered blowers. Click [here](#)¹ to see my qualifications and credentials.

You may not know this, but there are groups of people, from outside your community, working hard to have gasoline-powered leaf blowers banned throughout the country. Citizens for a Quieter Sacramento and Quiet Communities are two such organizations. The titles for these two groups confirm that the one true issue with leaf blowers is noise. Many cities consider this a weak reason for banning them, so ban advocates look for other reasons. The concept of citing health hazards as the reason for a ban was initiated by Peter and Susan Kendall of Orinda California. You can read all about them in the [New Yorker, October 25, 2010 issue](#)⁴. Because sound was not a compelling enough reason for banning leaf blowers, Ms. Kendall said, "I would (in the future) try to get the law classified not under noise but under health and safety..." So, the Kendalls and many others have searched the Internet for statements and enlisted dignitaries that would support their mission, regardless of the truth. I'm sure you know from your experience with the media that if something is said often enough, by many different people, or put in print by many sources, regardless of the facts, people will tend to believe it as being true. They then will proceed to confidently restate these unproven hypotheses emphatically.

The people that are trying to convince you to ban leaf blowers are well meaning, conscientious, and dedicated to improving the environment, but they are not professionals. What I mean by not being professional is that none of them are in any way professionally involved in the use, development, or accreditation of gasoline-powered yard care products. I venture to say that they themselves have likely never even used these products personally and therefore have no concept of how valuable they are to homeowners and professional users.

The background material presented, which appears to support a blower ban, may be true in concept, but the impact of these claims as caused by a leaf blower is overstated. The contribution from each exhaust constituent is not significant as it

relates to low powered yard care products. Exhaust emission from handheld engines consists of three significant components:

- carbon dioxide (CO₂),
- carbon monoxide (CO),
- unburned hydrocarbons.

All other professed exhaust emission constituents are insignificant or non-existent in small handheld gasoline-powered equipment.

Consider [greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide](#) ⁵ for instance:

Gasoline is a hydrocarbon, which when completely burned turns into water vapor (H₂O) and Carbon Dioxide (CO₂). Carbon dioxide generation is directly proportional to the amount of fuel burned. While driving your car, how many gallons of gasoline do you burn in a week, one tank full (18 gallons)? How many cars in your household are used to drive to work? How much do you burn in a leaf blower in a week? Most likely not more than 10 ounces. A gallon, by the way, is 128 ounces. The average automobile is 230 times worse than a leaf blower when it comes to the emission of greenhouse gasses. Even though automobiles have a sophisticated emission control system, none of these controls will reduce the amount of CO₂ generated. Computers and catalytic converters minimize the emission of unburned hydrocarbons by converting them into water and carbon dioxide.

Aspen, Colorado did a [study](#) ⁶ to find the major sources of CO₂, and lawn care products were not even on the scale.

Likewise, carbon monoxide is of even less concern since leaf blowers are used outdoors, where it is quickly dissipated. Like carbon dioxide it is produced in small amounts, because of the almost insignificant amount of fuel being burned.

Hydrocarbon emission is another matter. The federal government has set standards for this component, which manufacturers must comply with. Thirty years ago, hydrocarbons, or unburned fuel in the exhaust, were identified to be the source of environmental pollution. It caused smog, sometimes called "ozone". Admittedly, automobile manufacturers have done a lot over the years to reduce this constituent in exhaust gasses. But the leaf blower engine has also been improved. Mandated by the EPA, hydrocarbon emission has been reduced by as much as 90%, effective January 2005. See "[Certified Emission Levels](#)" ⁷. Athens can mandate cleaner engines by disallowing blowers built prior to 2005. See [emission label](#) ⁸ for manufacturing date.

When you consider emission improvements and the amount of time per week a blower is used compared to an automobile, [gasoline-powered motor vehicles are 30 to 45 times worse](#)⁹. Time of use must be a consideration in this comparison.

Two-stroke engines may be somewhat dirtier than the automobile, ounce per ounce of fuel burned, but they are not as dirty as you have been led to believe. In the referenced article, a report from “Experts at Edwards” indicated that leaf blowers were “drastically worse” than a “high performance pickup truck”. Suffice it to say here that this is a bogus claim. To learn why, check out the report at the following site: <https://www.leafblowernoise.com/edmonds%20test%20response2.pdf>¹⁰

Don't be misled by claims that blowers make harmful clouds of dust. You need to ask; what kind of dust are we talking about? According to the EPA, the particulate matter that is potentially harmful to someone's health is known as PM10 and PM2.5. Nitrous oxides are the source of [particulate matter](#)¹¹. Leaf blowers cannot generate PM10 and PM2.5, so there is no justification for banning them for this reason. As for their ability to lift PM particles from the ground and suspend them indefinitely, that is not possible. PM10 and PM2.5 particles are already in the air. Because they are so small and lightweight, the wind keeps these particles suspended. The brown haze you see over a city is comprised of these particles. Should it settle to the ground due to rain or high humidity, it will immediately attach itself to a larger particle which when disturbed by a leaf blower, will return to the ground within a few feet of being raised. You can see from the above “Particulate Matter” link, even PM2.5 is not a viable argument for banning the leaf blower.

I see that the misery caused by COVID-19, the new scourge for 2020, has been falsely tied in part to the leaf blower. Working at home can be different from what people are used to because of the noise outside their window. I say different because where is there an office that is absolutely quiet. Leaf blower noise is just different. So is a vacuum cleaner or a dishwasher. Are these laborsaving devices going to be banned next, or is it only someone else's noise that is to be banned?

Almost everything that can be presented, other than noise, can be exposed as a falsehood when attributed to a leaf blower, if you take the time to read the articles at the following links:

[Are automobiles cleaner?](#)⁹

[What about global warming?](#)⁵

[Are leaf blowers hazardous to your health?](#)¹¹

[Greenwich Department of Health](#)¹²

[Dr. Steel's Report to California Legislature](#)¹³

[Excessive Dust](#)¹⁴

[Dust study and comparison.](#)¹⁵

[What do Doctors say?](#) ¹⁶

[Education](#) ¹⁷

[Suggested Ordinance Content](#) ²⁸

[Will a ban work?](#) ¹⁸

[Leaf Blower vs. Broom](#) ¹⁹

[Noise](#) ²⁰ has long been associated with the leaf blower, but there is a way this noise can be mitigated in Athens without an outright ban. The industry deliberately addressed this issue in response to complaints 20 years ago. Millions of dollars have been spent designing, testing, and revising their manufacturing assembly lines, in order to reduce the noise from leaf blowers.

In the case of the gasoline-powered leaf blower, sound level is measured at 50 feet per the industry Standard ([ANSI B175.2](#)) ²¹. A “Quiet” leaf blower is 65 dB(A) or less, measured per the above Standard. This is at least a seventy-five percent reduction in sound or 12 dB(A), from a typical noisy leaf blower at 77 dB(A).

This much sound reduction is hard to accept as being true for the average person because we cannot comprehend from experience what a 75% reduction sounds like. The best thing to do is to witness an actual leaf blower sound comparison, but I know that it is not easy to arrange this. An alternative is to check out the [video](#) ²² of an actual demonstration developed for the comparison of leaf blowers on my website.

Fortunately, because of the industry’s foresight, any city that wants to limit the sound emanating from a gas-powered leaf blower can easily determine sound magnitude in the field without testing. The consumer can also determine compliance with local sound limitations at the point of purchase via the attached [label](#) ²³. This decal has been on all gasoline powered leaf blowers manufactured in the United States for at least the past fifteen years. If there is no label on a unit, it does not comply.

Quiet leaf blowers have been available for a long time, however, not all leaf blowers are quiet. Therefore, I encourage you to learn more about these quiet blowers and if a ban is in order, ban only the noisy ones.

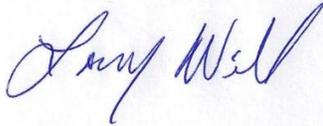
Just so you know, in some cities, banning gasoline-powered leaf blowers has been very controversial. Lawn care contractors have taken at least one city to [court](#) ²⁴ over a ban. The reason is because it significantly impacts their livelihood. People generally do not like more rules, especially if the rule costs them money or infringes on their personal lifestyle. Banning the leaf blower, to many, seems like a subjugation to someone else’s lifestyle and ultimately is not well received.

Don’t just do what other cities have done, do what works for Athens, a beautiful city of character and tradition. If one is hearing leaf blowers every day at this time of

year, it is only because people value the aesthetics of their property. I trust you value the cleanliness of the city as well. The leaf blower is an important part of maintaining that appearance in a highly populated city full of trees.

If you should want more technical information about leaf blowers that is not clearly addressed here or on my website, please contact me and I will do whatever I can to help, at no cost to you, including further research on your behalf.

Best regards,



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To learn more about ECHO:
<http://www.echo-usa.com/About-ECHO/About-Us> ²⁷

LINKS TO REFERENCES

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