



Enforcement of blower ban places strain on Newton police department



Jill Odom | October 24, 2017

The blower bans have been a contentious point between landscapers and homeowners in certain regions for years now and in Newton, Massachusetts, there have been around 320 complaints since the new ordinance rolled out in April.

Newton had been striving to find a middle ground for years, and finally passed its ruling on Jan. 18 after four hours of debate.

The final ordinance ended up restricting all blowers to be 65 decibels or less and from Memorial Day to Labor Day only one electric or battery-powered blower may be used per lot. Gas-powered models are permitted after Labor Day until the day before Memorial Day.

Leaf blower usage has also been limited to running 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays and not at all on Sundays. Only residents on their own property can run blowers from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sundays.

Previously the town had attempted to **ban leaf blowers** entirely but received too much pushback on the practicality of trying to clean up fallen leaves without any blowers.

Yet some citizens would like nothing more than the total ban. Karen Bray, leader of Newton Safe and Sound, has been vocal about her disapproval for the landscaping tool.

“They have a high-pitched, screeching whine,” Bray told [WBZ-TV](#). “They raise your blood pressure. When you’re in your home office, it’s impossible to think. The quality of life has been very decreased by the overuse of leaf blowers.”

While it was suggested in previous meetings that a civilian code enforcement officer be responsible for responding to complaints, it has become another duty of the Newton Police Department to respond to various calls from residents about potential violators.

Around 75 percent of the time an officer arrived at the site of a complaint, the landscaping crew was either already gone, not using a leaf blower, or following the ordinance.

The penalty for violating the ordinance is a warning on the first offense, a \$100 fine on the second offense, a \$200 fine for the third offense and \$300 for fourth and subsequent violations. However, the police have opted to focus on an educational approach, only issuing seven citations so far compared to more than 80 verbal and written warnings.

Out of the complaints received city records show about 15 citizens made about 42 percent of the calls. One individual called the police 18 different times about the leaf blowers. Majority of the time residents complained about the noise it was actually another piece of equipment in use from lawn mowers to a crew removing a tree or paving a driveway.

“From what I gather, people have been calling every time they see a landscaping truck,” Mike Caruso, owner of Caruso Bros., told WBZ-TV. “It makes me frustrated. It makes me want to say, ‘The heck with Newton.’”

Caruso has been in business since 1976 and he isn’t the only landscaping company that sees the ban as an inconvenience that hurts their productivity. Previously the landscapers had lobbied for 77-decibel leaf blowers for certain occasions, such as leaf blowing season in the fall.

“The laws of physics and economics are not exempt from the City of Newton,” Caruso told WBZ-TV. “You can buy a can of compressed air and it’s better than the leaf blower we are allowed to use.”

In response to the unexpectedly high amount of complaints police chief David MacDonald decided that no more than one officer would respond to a leaf blower complaint at the same time.