

October 15, 2020

**TO: Mayor Dean Trantalis, Fort Lauderdale, Florida**

**Copy: Vice Mayor Steven Glassman  
Commissioner Heather Moraitis  
Commissioner Robert L McKinzie  
Commissioner Ben Sorensen**

**From: [Larry Will](#)**



Reference:

<https://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/fort-lauderdale/fl-ne-leaf-blower-ban-fort-lauderdale-20201009-bdy44h2w65cw7ipcfx6ghbnzb4-story.html>

Mr. Trantalis:

I see from the referenced Internet article that you are concerned with what leaf blower use may be doing to your extraordinary and very unique city. I have vacationed in Fort Lauderdale in the past and after taking a harbor cruise, I was extremely impressed. Clearly, water plays an especially important part in the aesthetics of both the downtown area as well as that of the residential communities. I can see why you and Mr. Glassman would not like to see grass clippings and other debris contaminating your waterways. But I think your idea of banning the leaf blower, when it is the operator that is the cause of your problem, just might not be the right direction to go. I would like to offer some alternative suggestions that would not only address the contamination issue in your waterways but would address

some other issues often brought up when leaf blower use becomes part of the city's agenda.

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's leaf blower issue, nor am I trying to interfere with any decision you deem necessary. But I am a source of facts about the design and use of cordless and gasoline powered leaf blowers, as well as what other communities have done in dealing with the leaf blower issue. Please click [here](#) to review my qualifications and credentials.

In addition to keeping your waterways clear from debris, it is no doubt equally important to you that everyone's residence be pleasing to look at. That is, it would not be very nice to see grass clippings, leaves and twigs from trees, and other debris from bushes and hedges rotting on streets, driveways and sidewalks. The tools from early in the last century may be able to do the job, but no one will like using these back breakers, especially the elderly.

There is one other alternative, and that is to use electric or battery-powered leaf blowers, but that does not solve your primary problem of improper use. So, what will solve your problem? Well, it is educating users with the certification and licensing of professionals.

Let us first agree that it would be best for all if some form of leaf blower design was allowed in order to maintain the aesthetic value of the city. What is needed, therefore, is a program that will address the misuse problem.

In a city with the type of estates found in Fort Lauderdale, most of which are located adjacent to the water, clearly there is a need for professional lawn care providers. It is feasible and effective to require these people to be trained, certified and licensed to use leaf blowers as guided by rules that you can set down. Arizona enacted [Bill SB1552](#), which among other things, set down requirements that must be met in order to legally use a leaf blower in certain areas of the state. They also did a nice job getting out the word to the homeowner with a [flier](#). These are some of the requirements they included:

Prohibit the use of leaf blowers by employees of professional yard care providers on high pollution days.

- Prohibit using leaf blowers to blow debris into the street at any time by any person.
- Prohibit the operation of leaf blowers except on stabilized surfaces. (Stabilized means: paved, covered with grass, covered with decorative rock

or paving stones or mulch, or chemically treated in some way that limits the disturbance of loose or dusty surfaces)

- Require any person, who receives payment for services relating to operating a leaf blower, to complete training once every three years on how to properly operate the blower. This should include how to minimize the generation of dust emissions. (Fort Lauderdale can have local trade schools provide this training for a nominal fee.)
- City will produce printed materials designed to educate and inform operators on safe and efficient leaf blower use. Any person who rents or sells leaf blower equipment must provide this information to the renter or buyer.

There are other important restrictions you can include that will benefit the city. These include:

- Disallow the use of any gasoline-powered leaf blower that does not meet emission requirements set in effect January 1, 2005. This will bring exhaust emission limits down to the lowest level required by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Units built after that date will have its hydrocarbon exhaust emission lowered by 85 to 90% from previously untreated engines. (The build date for an engine can be determined from the [emission label](#).)
- Disallow gasoline-powered leaf blowers that are not quiet or 65 dB(A) or lower as [labeled](#) on the unit by the manufacturer.
- Allow the use of battery-powered leaf blowers.
- Set reasonable and acceptable days and hours of use.

Ordinarily, the underlying issue with the gasoline powered leaf blower, is [noise](#). If this is not significant yet, it likely will be before you reach a decision regarding an ordinance. I'd like you to know that the industry got the message about blower noise more than 20 years ago and deliberately addressed it in response to complaints.

This paragraph may sound like a commercial, but that is not my intention. In response to noise complaints, a number of years ago my engineering department developed the first "Quiet" gasoline powered leaf blower. This was done in direct response to the claims made in the field regarding leaf blower noise. Today, several other manufacturers have joined in, investing millions of dollars in tooling, testing and new assembly lines to provide this important alternative to a blower ban. It is important because this is the solution to the leaf blower noise issue.

In the case of a gasoline powered leaf blower, sound level is measured at 50 feet per an industry Standard ([ANSI B175.2](#)). As mentioned above, a “Quiet” leaf blower is 65 dB(A) or less, measured per the above Standard. This is at least a 75% reduction in sound or 12 dB(A), from a typical noisy leaf blower at 77 dB(A).

This much sound reduction is hard to comprehend. The average person cannot picture from experience what a 75% reduction in sound is 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](#) of an actual demonstration developed for the comparison of leaf blowers on my website. Ms. Kathy Diaz will be surprised to learn that a plane flying overhead is in fact louder than a quiet leaf blower by many decibels, for this was measured and recorded, quite by accident.

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](#). This decal has been on all gasoline powered leaf blowers manufactured in the United States for at least the past fifteen years.

Battery-powered leaf blowers are becoming very popular among homeowners. It does an adequate job clearing debris from paved surfaces and therefore may be viable for the homeowner. It is faster than a broom or rake and does a much better job. If you are taking issue with just the gasoline-powered leaf blower, disallow it for the homeowner, but leave the professional have the more powerful version, if it is a quiet unit. He will only be using it for a few minutes per location anyway.

You see, battery powered blowers have lower performance than that of a gasoline powered unit, because of their limited available propulsion energy from a battery. This means it takes more time to get the job done. But most homeowners do not mind having to spend a little extra time working in their yard, as long as it doesn’t take too much time. To many, their yard is a source of pride and pleasure, requiring a great deal of care, with a personal touch.

To others, yardwork is a pain. It is just a yard with grass that never quits growing, and trees that continually shed leaves, seed pods and twigs, always in need of grooming. These people turn to the yard care professional for this task. Most landscapers consider the battery powered blower inadequate. To make money, they must get the job done fast. This can only be done with a gasoline powered blower.

Just so you know, in some cities, banning gasoline-powered leaf blowers has been controversial. You already know that lawn care providers argue against a ban. One professional group took a city to [court](#) over a ban. The reason was because it significantly impacts their livelihood.

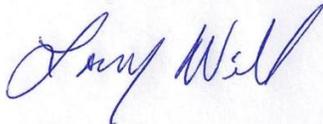
One other potential obstacle could be enforcement. Police officers, in most cases, are reluctant to cite their neighbors with leaf blower violations. Not when their primary job is to apprehend criminals, prevent acts of violence and ardently protect citizens and their property. Lots of cities have problems with enforcement; Palo Alto, Santa Monica, and Los Angeles just to mention a few.

One more thing. As people start to blame the leaf blower for damaging the environment, you may not know this, but there is a group of people, from outside your community, working hard to have gasoline-powered leaf blowers banned throughout the US. The concept of citing health and environmental 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](#). 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..." Since then, the Kendall's and many others have searched the Internet for statements and 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, to people like yourself.

Well intended though they may be, keep in mind that those arguing for a leaf blower ban are not professionals, that is, none of them are in any way professionally involved in the use, development, or accreditation of the leaf blower. They can only quote information presented by others with no way of knowing if what they present is based on facts and qualified tests or is simply inuendo and opinion.

If you should need information 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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