

January 13, 2016

**Mayor Muriel Bowser  
Council Chairman Phil Mendelson  
and  
Washington DC Council Members**

RE: Council member Mary Cheh's and Jack Evans' Leaf Blower Bill

In response to: Wesley Heights Advisory Neighborhood Commission Request and Certain Residents of Foggy Bottom

Ladies and Gentleman:

I see from articles on the internet that Council Member Cheh has introduced a bill to ban leaf blowers in 2022. Haskell Small, James and Deb Fallows and Commissioner Stu Ross, of the Wesley Heights Neighborhood Commission, are the driving force behind this bill. They have asked Council Member Cheh to devise an appropriate legislative solution to their issue of leaf blower noise at the city level since Wesley Heights has no legislative power. The key word in their request is "appropriate" because a ban is always problematic and alternatives should be seriously considered.

I am a former Vice President of Engineering for Echo Inc., a leading manufacturer of lawn care products (company information below). Since my retirement, I have been disseminating 'up to date' information about modern leaf blowers throughout the United States and Canada. I have helped more than 133 communities sort fact from fiction, which typically results in a reasonable and effective regulation that reduces leaf blower noise.

<http://leafblownoise.com/List%20of%20cities.htm>

You will find that dealing with leaf blower noise on a legislative level can be difficult and very controversial. You need only speak to Joe Caruso ((617) 966-5421) of Newton, MA or Faith Michaels ((617) 543 2962) of Brookline to confirm this. Believe it or not, people are extraordinarily polarized on the issue. As you know, there are those that are annoyed by blowers, wanting to ban them entirely, and then there are those that can't tolerate losing the option to use them. It is not unusual for those in opposition to the leaf blower to get angry and very loud, when they get together to discuss this issue. I make available the facts about leaf blowers so people like yourself can calmly and quietly arrive at an informed decision, not as a local stakeholder, but as a friend to the city and those that see banning as an unreasonable request.

The first thing to consider is that a ban on gasoline powered leaf blowers will not work. For one thing, it cannot be enforced. The average contractor will ignore a ban because he needs the blower to efficiently do his job. These people would rather take the chance of paying an occasional fine then go with the alternative, which takes more than eight times as long to do the job. There are two videos on my website to prove this point <http://leafblownoise.com/>. They

also know that the police have little patience with this type of ordinance because they have more important things to do than chase down leaf blower operators. Most homeowners that use them cannot see themselves reverting to the ways of the last century, i.e. using a rake or broom. To better understand this, check out a report to the Mayor and City Council of Santa Monica, California: <http://leafblownoise.com/Santa%20Monica%20Report.pdf>. They have had a ban in place for 20 years and are still trying to figure out how to enforce it.

Today, this issue is being debated in Newton and Brookline MA, with meeting after meeting, delays and postponements. It is truly a sound issue, that is to say a noise issue, and for some it is a passionate issue. Some people heatedly talk in meetings and soon thereafter, as if they were at a sporting event, shout epithets similar to those normally directed at the officials or players that have dropped the ball, if you know what I mean.

DC already has an ordinance in place limiting sound to 70 dB(A) measured at 50 feet. How well is that working? Fortunately, leaf blowers have a label that states the sound level at this distance <http://leafblownoise.com/Sound%20label%20mounted.jpg>. Consequently, it is easy to determine compliance in the field. I would like to recommend changing the existing ordinance to 65 dB(A), only for leaf blowers. Note that for every 6 dB(A) reduction in sound, the magnitude drops by 50%. Now this is the best way to address leaf blower sound because people will adhere to the new ruling, especially the landscape contractor. To him, anything is better than taking away the blower.

Another way you can help the environment is to remove older blowers that have not been optimized for exhaust emission. Any unit older than January 1, 2005 has not reached its lowest emission level. Here too, you can tell the manufacturing date by looking at the emission label on the unit <http://leafblownoise.com/Mounted%20emission%20Label.jpg>.

The anti-leaf blower advocate will tell you that leaf blowers are worse than the automobile when it comes to exhaust emission, but that is no longer true. They like to quote from a test that was conducted by Edmonds.com. This test is invalid and should be disregarded. See the following explanation; <http://leafblownoise.com/edmonds%20test%20response2.pdf>. Regardless, regulating exhaust emission is preempted by the EPA and cannot be regulated locally <http://leafblownoise.com/Taken%20from%20the%20Federal%20Clean%20Air%20Act.pdf>.

As for particulate matter, a pollutant attributed to leaf blowers on one website <http://www.wesleyheightsneighbors.org/?p=1168>, leaf blowers are an insignificant contributor. The only particulate matter considered to be potentially hazardous to your health by the EPA is tiny particles known as PM10 and PM2.5. These particles are so small that they cannot be seen except for when a shaft of sunlight illuminates them against a dark background. Indoors they are suspended in the air until removed by an air filter or furnace filter, and if outdoors, by rain. PM10 and PM2.5 are byproducts of diesel engines and power plants and are everywhere. These particulates are not generated by leaf blowers. Airborne dust raised by leaf blowers is heavy in comparison and falls back to earth within a few feet of the blower nozzle.

At your leisure, please take a half hour or so to go over my website. You will find a wealth of information specifically dealing with the issue of leaf blower sound as well as many other claims made about the blower.

We, the manufacturers of leaf blowers have spent millions of dollars to provide a solution to the noise problem. I am only suggesting that you take advantage of that alternative.

In your effort to sort through this issue, if you should need information that is not clearly addressed on my website, please contact me and I will do whatever I can to help, including further research on your behalf.

Best regards,

Larry Will  
Leaf Blower Information Specialist  
ECHO Inc.  
479-256-0282  
Email: [info@leafblownoise.com](mailto:info@leafblownoise.com)  
Website: <http://leafblownoise.com/>

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