

October 2, 2020

**TO: Mayor Terry Tornek  
Pasadena City Councilmembers  
and  
EAC Representatives**



By: Larry Will

Subject: Potential Leaf Blower Ordinance

Reference: <https://www.pasadenanow.com/main/fate-of-leaf-blowers-taken-up-by-environmental-advisory-commission/>

Dear Mayor Tornek:

I am a source of facts about the design and use of cordless and gasoline powered leaf blowers that will be helpful in understanding the many issues that will confront you regarding the leaf blower. I am a former Vice President of Engineering for Echo Inc., a leading manufacturer of powered handheld lawn care products. Not being a stakeholder in your community's leaf blower issue, I am not trying to interfere with any decision you deem necessary. I will make suggestions, but in the end, the decision rests with you and the Commission. Please click [here](#) to review my qualifications and credentials.

I see from the referenced article that Pasadena's Environmental Advisory Commission is once again reviewing the leaf blower issue. It appears that the effort is to accumulate even more facts than you already have, concerning leaf blowers, that will help guide the commission to an informed decision regarding a blower ban. I have seen this attempted before. It usually amounts to a compilation of reasons why blowers should be banned, with little attention given to facts presented by the other side of the issue. Perhaps this is because there are not a lot of sources for this kind of detail. It does appear from the referenced article that Pasadena may not

be that one sided. You stated that *“Our committee as an advisory body is merely gathering information. We’ve done the background research and we’re gathering input from the public...”*

Since residents can only express how they feel about leaf blowers and their use, where do the facts come from? I have seen where cities allow, even solicit, from outside the local community, presentations from anti-leaf blower advocates such as “Quiet Communities”. But these same cities refuse to allow input from someone like myself, an industrial professional that has true facts about leaf blowers, including the other side of the issue. Understanding that bias picked up from those advocating for a ban, I am hopeful someone in your program will take the time to review my letter carefully and follow the links I have provided that justify my statements. I think you will find that what I have to say will be of great value to you.

I have not seen any recent articles concerning EAC’s present position, but a year ago a memorandum wrongly blamed leaf blowers for excessive hydrocarbon exhaust emission. Among other things, it cited a California Air Quality Management District study from 2000 that makes denigrating remarks about the leaf blower. That report is 19 years old and in no way represents the performance of today’s modern leaf blower engine. I have responded to these and the other statements in the memo in a letter to Pasadena on March 19, 2019, so I won’t go into these issues now. Click [here](#) to access that letter if you want to read my comments.

Ordinarily, the underlying issue with the gasoline powered leaf blower, is noise. If this is not the primary issue now, 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](#)). A “Quiet” leaf blower is 65 dB(A) or less, measured per the ANSI 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. As expected, you will see 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 I’d like to add.

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. A leaf blower is a primary tool when it comes to maintaining a well-groomed yard.

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.

In your effort to sort through this issue, be sure to include professional contractors in your discussion. You will find that they do not understand all the issues, but they will tell you how a blower ban will impact their income and how their customers will react to a cost increase.

Other cities have considered the following when developing a leaf blower control ordinance.

- 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 on how to properly operate the blower. This should include how to minimize the generation of dust emissions. (Local trade schools can provide this training for a nominal fee.)
- 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.

- 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 California Air Resources Board (CARB). 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.

If you should need information that is not clearly addressed here or in my previous letter, you can find more on my website. Otherwise, you can contact me directly 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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