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On the beat

Leaf blower use hard to enforce

By Adam Gwartz

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Q: As I understand it leaf blowers are illegal in Santa Monica? They kick up dust and make a horrible noise. I always see the police drive right by them, why aren't they stopping those things? Are the electric blowers legal? Are there any legal alternatives?

A: You are absolutely right. Leaf blowers are illegal in Santa Monica. Section 4.08.270 (a) of the Santa Monica municipal code bars "motorized" leaf blowers within the city. This prohibits their use at all times and includes gas and electric blowers. When we receive calls from citizens of leaf blower violations, the typical response time from an officer is usually greater than the average time the device is being used (Presently the average response time is about 24 minutes to leaf blower calls). Combine that with the fact the last thing gardeners do before they finish a job is use the leaf blower, many times the violator is gone before we arrive on scene. If the gardener is still on scene we cite the person who we observe using the blower. If the leaf blower is not actively being used then we typically advise the gardening crew. Simple possession of the device is not a violation, so if it is not actively being used or operated then there is no violation of the law.

When officers are out on patrol and see violations they make every effort to stop and enforce or warn gardeners regarding the law. We have to take into account gardeners are otherwise engaged in lawful — community beautifying activity. Gardeners frequently tell me using a leaf blower saves time, effort, water and money. They get more done in less time so they can keep their fees as low as possible. Violations of the leaf blower ordinance are important, but they are not an immediate life or property emergency. If an officer is responding to a potential life or property call for service they typically will not stop to cite or warn the violator.