

Leaf blower rules would put onus on landscapers

By Wynne Parry
Staff Writer
Stamford Advocate

Article Launched: 03/26/2008 01:00:00 AM EDT

STAMFORD - In hopes of quieting some roaring landscaping equipment, city lawmakers have narrowed their focus to leaf blowers operated by commercial contractors.

An amendment to the city's noise ordinance would require professional landscapers to use blowers certified to produce 65 decibels or less. On Monday night, a Board of Representatives committee gave it unanimous approval.

The proposal needs the approval of the full Board of Representatives before it could go into effect. No date is set for a vote, and the board could call for a public hearing before taking action.

"In the end, what we are encouraging landscapers to do is use up-to-date, modern equipment that makes less noise," City Rep. Gregory Lodato, R-20, said in an interview.

Lodato originally proposed limiting loud landscaping equipment for all users, but that prospect raised concerns about enforcement. City Rep. James Diamond, D-11, reworked the proposal to focus on leaf blowers operated by commercial landscapers. All such blowers would be required to have an American National Standards Institute decibel rating of no more than 65.

"I was reluctant to draft an ordinance that would require hundreds of homeowners to buy new equipment," Diamond said during the committee's discussion.

In its earlier form, the proposal would have required police to use noise meters to check leaf blower compliance. However, this raised concerns for officers generally unequipped and unfamiliar with noise meters.

Requiring officers to simply check a label, "seems to be easier to enforce," said Lt. Sean Cooney, a Police Department spokesman.

In January, Larry Will, a retired vice president of the landscaping equipment manufacturer Echo Inc., visited the Board of Representatives and demonstrated gas and electric-powered blowers.

The 65-decibel limit represents the quietest blowers on the market, he said, noting that the noise level is equivalent to the ambient sound in an office of 10 people.

"When you get into the technical side of solving the problem, you realize the issue is more sound quality than it is sound volume. Leaf blowers have a tendency to scream a very high-pitched sound," he said. Lower-toned blowers are on the market, he said.

The prospect of more regulation - and possibly replacing his blowers - did not please landscaper Tony Femia.

"It's a touchy subject for me," he said in an interview. Femia said his Stamford-based landscaping businesses uses about 20 backpack blowers and 10 large blowers mounted on wheels. He anticipates many of these will still be working by Jan. 1, 2009, the date the new limit would go into effect if the regulation is passed.

"I agree with the decibel thing, but put the burden on the manufacturer, not the guy who is trying to make a living out in the field," he said.