

Case Study: Residential Gas Leaf Blower Ban

By Dan Lieberman for the City of Albany Sustainability Committee

May 7, 2008

Background

On November 6, 2007 concerned resident Amy Adair contacted Mayor Lieber inquiring about whether the City has given any thought to a resolution banning the use of leaf blowers in Albany. Mayor Lieber forwarded the request to our committee.

Analysis

Gas powered leaf blowers and lawn mowers are a source of air and noise pollution. They rely on two-stroke engines which “emit as much pollution in an hour as a car would if it drove 100 miles”¹ and operate at levels of 70-75 decibels. Alternatives to these tools include a variety of emissions-free and low-noise alternatives including electric leaf blowers, electric mowers, rakes, and manual mowers. These products are widely available.

According to various websites, cities with leaf-blower bans include Berkeley, Beverly Hills, Claremont, Dana Point, Foster City, Indian Wells, Laguna Beach, Lawndale, Los Altos, Los Angeles, Menlo Park, Palo Alto, Sacramento, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Santa Monica, Sunnyvale, and Vancouver. According to the Washington Post: “More than 20 communities in California joined Los Angeles in banning them, the latest the generally serious-minded and well-heeled citizens of Palo Alto.”

Berkeley’s ordinance states:

“it shall be unlawful for any person, including any City employee, to operate any portable machine powered with a gasoline engine used to blow leaves, dirt, and other debris off sidewalks, driveways, lawns or other surfaces within the City limits.

a. Notice of this prohibition shall be posted in all stores selling such gasoline powered machines within the City limits. (Ord. 6026-NS § 1, 1990: Ord. 5500-NS § 1 (part), 1982)”

California Landscape Contractors Association is opposed to a ban on gas leaf blowers.² They do not see electric leaf blowers as a suitable substitute as they are “less powerful” and “limited by the need for an extension cord.”

Additional Considerations

- What portion of the Albany community’s greenhouse gas emissions results from gas leafblowers and lawn mowers?
- How quickly would such a ban be imposed?

¹ http://www.cleanhouston.org/comments/river_oaks/alternatives.htm

² http://www.clca.org/clca/about/leaf_blowers.php

- What would the penalty for non-compliance be?
- How would the ban be enforced?
- Would gas powered lawn mowers, string trimmers, chain saws, and/or other gardening equipment also be banned.
- Can we encourage the city to host a leaf-blower trade-in event sponsored by PG&E.

Information Resources:

<http://www.zapla.org/overview/blowerdef.html>

<http://www.nonoise.org/quietnet/cqs/other.htm>