

**CITY OF ALBANY
SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE AGENDA
STAFF REPORT**

Agenda Date: March 19, 2014

SUBJECT: Proposed Leaf Blower Ordinance

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BACKGROUND

Approximately 20 cities in California have leaf blower bans in place. The severity of the ban varies by city, with some cities allowing use during working hours or on public property (Attachment 1).

It has been found that both gas-powered leaf blowers cause considerable noise and air pollution. Noise causes stress and the body reacts with increased adrenaline, changes in the heart rate, and elevated blood pressure. Both gas and electric leaf blowers stir up mold, allergens, pesticides, heavy metals, and fecal contaminants from the ground into the air. Particulate matter can increase the number and severity of asthma attacks, cause or aggravate bronchitis or other lung diseases, and reduce the ability to fight infections.

DISCUSSION

Although leaf blowers can cause noise and air pollution, there are several major concerns with a City-wide ban, outlined below.

Enforcement

The City of Albany does not currently have code enforcement staff to follow-through on an ordinance of this nature. Several other cities with leaf blower bans are not actively enforcing them. Staff is hesitant to pass an ordinance without a strategy for enforcement.

Public Works Compliance

City maintenance staff uses leaf blowers for landscaping projects, to blow dust out of potholes before patching, clearing pathways at parks, and maintaining the sandbox at the Tot Lot. Maintenance workers have expressed the need for leaf blowers to perform these functions in a timely manner, as they already have limited staff. A ban on leaf blowers would also be difficult for larger Urban Forestry projects.

Alternate equipment includes rakes, brooms, leaf vacuums and electric leaf blowers. Electric blowers minimize engine pollution and lessen noise, but still leave intact the hazards associated with particulate matter.

The City of Berkeley has had a ban on gas-powered leaf blowers for 20 years, and Parks Division staff says it is still as a negative impact on operations. The City has to pay more for staff time to complete the same tasks and the quality of service provided is not as high as it would be with a leaf blower. They have found that rakes and brooms take about five times as long and pose more risk for repetitive motion injuries, resulting in staff time lost and increased workers' compensation claims. Staff has also found it frustrating that they must comply with the ordinance while there is lax enforcement in the community.

School District Compliance

The Albany Unified School District uses leaf blowers at all school sites. Although they are not required to comply with City ordinances, Facilities Supervisor Don Albright stated that they currently comply with all City ordinances and hope to continue that practice. That said, banning leaf blowers for landscaping at the school sites would not be feasible for AUSD based on their current workload and staff constraints.

Options

There are several options for banning leaf blowers outlined below. Because of enforcement concerns and staff constraints in the Public Works Department, City staff recommends the first phased-in approach at this time.

Options	Description	Pros	Cons
Phased Approach	1. Public Works gradually changes practices over a period of a few years (modifying times/locations for blower use and phasing in vacuums, using rakes/brooms where appropriate). 2. Discuss Citywide ban after this time period, based on success in Public Works	- Gradual ban will be easier for PW - Gives City more time to figure out how to effectively enforce residential ban	- There may be an impact on PW - AUSD might not comply with citywide ban - Residential use will continue for several years
Public Works Ban	- Only ban leaf blowers in Public Works; allow residential use to continue	- Enforcement is easier	- Doesn't address residential use - There may be an impact on PW
Citywide Ban on Gas Blowers	Ban gas-powered leaf blowers	- Addresses emissions issue - Addresses noise issue to some extent	- Doesn't address PM issue - Enforcement challenging - There may be an impact on PW

Citywide Ban on gas, electric and battery powered blowers	Ban all types leaf blowers	- Addresses emissions issue - Addresses PM issue - Addresses noise issue	- Enforcement challenging - There may be an impact on PW
Ban for residential use but not institutional use	Ban residential use of leaf blowers but allow PW use to continue	- No resistance from PW	- Doesn't address PW use - Difficult to enforce - Politically difficult
No Ban	Do not ban leaf blowers in PW or citywide. The Committee could choose to educate the public on hazards of leaf blowers instead.	- No resistance from PW or community - No need for enforcement	- Likely less effective than a ban - Staff time may be required to craft outreach campaign

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT

Banning leaf blowers could have a modest impact on greenhouse gas emissions in Albany. A gasoline powered leaf blower generates as much tailpipe emissions in one hour as an automobile does over 100 miles. A two-stroke commercial blower generates 277 lbs. of volatile organic compounds, 825 lbs. of carbon monoxide and 3.3 lbs. of particulates per year.

According to the California Environmental Protection Agency, one hour of leaf-blower use emits more than 26 times the amount of carbon monoxide, and more than 400 times the hydrocarbon emissions, produced by driving a new car at 30 mph for one hour.

Attachments

1. City of Coronado Memo