



Letters to the Editor Archive: Lake Oswego Review

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Request to ban gas-powered yard equipment

I urge the city of Lake Oswego to ban gas-powered yard equipment due to its excessive noise and toxic pollution. These machines disrupt our community's peace and pose significant health and environmental risks.

Gas-powered leaf blowers and mowers produce noise levels exceeding 90 decibels, disrupting neighborhoods and causing stress, sleep disturbances and hearing damage. Battery-powered alternatives operate at a fraction of this noise, improving quality of life for residents.

Beyond noise, gas-powered equipment emits harmful pollutants, including carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides and fine particulate matter. A single gas leaf blower can generate as much pollution in an hour as a car driving hundreds of miles. These emissions contribute to climate change and exacerbate respiratory conditions like asthma, disproportionately affecting children and the elderly.

Many cities, including Washington, D.C., and Portland, have already phased out gas-powered yard tools in favor of electric alternatives, which are quieter, cleaner and increasingly affordable. Lake Oswego should follow their lead to protect public health, reduce noise pollution and promote sustainability.

I urge you to take decisive action by implementing a ban on gas-powered yard equipment. Our community deserves a cleaner, quieter and healthier environment.

Steve Kruss
Lake Oswego

Donohoe, Martin. "CITIZEN'S VIEW: Lake Oswego council should ban gas leaf blowers." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Newsletter, 9 Jan. 2025.

Lake Oswego council should ban gas leaf blowers
Martin Donohoe, MD, FACP

Editor's note: *The author submitted the following as testimony to the Lake Oswego City Council and requested that it be printed on the Opinion page.*

My name is Martin Donohoe. I am a resident of Lake Oswego, parent and physician. I did my training at UCLA, Harvard and Stanford, have written a textbook on public health and social justice, and lecture nationally and internationally on several topics related to environmental health.

I am here to ask this city council to ban gas-powered leaf blowers because of the significant risks they present to public health. Pollution from gas-powered blowers takes two forms: noise and air.

Noise pollution produces auditory and non-auditory effects. Decibel levels of gas leaf blowers exceed safe levels up to a radius of 800 feet and contribute to hearing loss, tinnitus, stress and depression, due to the isolation consequent to hearing loss. Non-auditory effects include disturbance, annoyance, cognitive impairment (particularly in children), sleep disturbance and hypertension. Occupational and environmental epidemiology studies have shown a higher prevalence and incidence of cardiovascular disease and mortality where there is chronic noise exposure.

In terms of air pollution, gas blowers produce high levels global-warming associated carbon dioxide, fine particulate matter, cancer-causing pollutants such as benzene, formaldehyde and acetaldehyde, and toxic carbon monoxide. These emissions have adverse effects on brain and heart health and cause damage to developing fetuses. You have no doubt been made aware of the study showing emissions from a half hour's use of a single gas blower blower is equivalent to the emissions from a Ford F150 Raptor driving from North Texas to Anchorage, Alaska. Pollutants can stay in the air for quite some time, especially when they do not have a chance to dissipate because of the repeated use of gas blowers, in some neighborhoods for hours per day on most days of the week.

As a physician, I see regularly the harm caused by air pollution, which, in addition to contributing to hospital admissions for heart and lung disease and stroke, causes 75,000 premature deaths each year in the United States — more than auto accidents. Air pollution causes asthma and impaired lung development and function in children, whose lungs are still developing and thus more vulnerable to pollution's toxic effects. Asthmatics and those with emphysema experience higher medical costs and increased school and work absenteeism, as well as long-term risks associated with lung disease and early death. The medical and societal costs of pollution-related heart disease and cancers are, of course, also significant.

Gas blowers are terribly overused in Lake Oswego. Because people are either unable or unwilling to change, aka the "status quo bias," it is incumbent upon this City

Council, for public health reasons, to step in and ban them. Gas blower blower use adversely affects our citizens, especially children and those with pre-existing chronic illnesses, as well as landscape workers.

Portland and Multnomah County have already planned to completely phase out gas-powered leaf blowers by 2028 and over 100 cities nationwide have enacted bans. Lake Oswego should do the same. We all have a right to breathe clean air and to be free from acoustic assaults in our neighborhoods.

Thank you for listening.

Martin Donohoe is a Lake Oswego resident.

Robertson, Debbi. "OPINION: Leaf blowers need to go." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 3 Jan. 2025.

Leaf blowers need to go

I live in the Waluga Neighborhood of Lake Oswego, and have, very happily, for the past 28 years. However, something has been happening lately that threatens the usual peaceful nature of our neighborhood: The noise of the gas-powered leaf blowers and other landscape equipment has reached a level that is almost intolerable. And it is ubiquitous - starting early some mornings (weekends included) and carrying on until well after dusk. It's not just a personal dislike; science tells us that the low-frequency and decibel levels (which actually permeate walls), damage hearing as well as causing harmful stress.

The solution can be as simple as using a rake in the yard, and a broom on the driveway, both of which we practice at our home. If power tools are a must, switch to either electric or battery operated equipment. Though perhaps not quite as robust, they are as effective. And the whole neighborhood will thank you for it!

We love living in Lake Oswego, and truly value the serenity of our neighborhood. One small contribution has been to use only hand tools in the yard, and a small electric blower on the roof. Oregon has always been known for not doing business as usual. Let's keep that up and do the right thing by banning gas-powered equipment.

Debbi Robertson
Lake Oswego

Casemiro, Jackson. "OPINION: City should step in regarding gas leaf blowers." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 3 Jan. 2025.

City should step in regarding gas leaf blowers

Every Wednesday in the fall, the landscaping outside my window reaches a peak. Three men with gas-powered leaf blowers work in unison to create giant piles of leaves. It is comically loud

Beyond the deafening noise, these dirty two-stroke engines are horrible for air pollution. Without an exhaust system, they spew outsized amounts of CO₂, black carbon and hazardous carcinogens like benzene and formaldehyde right into the air you breathe.

All this adds up to a mountain of negative effects. It's an incredibly potent problem with a simple solution.

Electric replacements are more available and effective than ever, with lower lifetime ownership costs than gas. But even better is to skip the whole process, and let the leaves decompose where they fall, serving a vital role in the ecosystem and sparing the pesticides and allergens even electric leaf blowers will toss up into the air.

As a renter, I don't have the power to work with my landscaper to electrify or leave the leaves. I'm looking to city leaders to step in. Portland recently passed a ban on gas-powered leaf blowers by 2028. We can do the same.

We have a beautiful city. A Tree City USA. A Bee City USA. We should take the next step for the stewardship of our environment, our air, our landscapers, and our residents by banning gas-powered lawn equipment to make Lake Oswego quieter and cleaner.

There will be many hard problems to solve in the climate crisis. But this is an easy one.

Jackson Casemiro
Lake Oswego

Vanderwagen, Carrie. "OPINION: An imperfect yet apt analogy for clean and quiet yard care." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 18 Dec. 2024.

An imperfect yet apt analogy for clean and quiet yard care

Like smoking on an airplane, the way we keep our lawns today is a baffling, outdated convention. Growing public intolerance signaled the eventual demise of the once-freely acceptable practice of smoking on commercial flights. Luckily, the landscaping industry (equipment manufacturers and service providers) are open to the next stage, unlike airlines and tobacco who fought restrictions. Now we need guidelines from local leadership to steer change.

Over 50 years ago the first smoke-free advocates asked "why keep doing what is dangerous, unhealthy, unjust, irritating and unnecessary?"

From Ralph Nader in 1969, to Congressional testimony of flight attendants and many voices joined in coalition, it was decades before a governmental agency enacted policy in 1977 to give us the smoke-free flights we expect and enjoy today.

When we ask: why subject residents, operators and living beings to lovely homes we can't enjoy because of noxious fumes and noise, we have our answer.

We do have ways to enjoy outdoor beauty with less harm and more conscionable happiness. With electric devices and intentional practices, we now have near-parity and performance for our leaf-removal and lawn care. The industry is ready to make the change for public good.

We can choose. Thanks to the efforts of a few early advocates, then evolving coalitions of passionate, occasionally outspoken, sometimes-kooky (myself), justifiably impatient citizens, let's bid farewell to the bygone era of internal combustion engine damage in our own backyards.

Carrie Vanderwagen
Lake Oswego

King, Elena. "OPINION: Time to ban gas-powered leaf blowers." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 4 Dec. 2024.

Time to ban gas-powered leaf blowers

Have you ever awakened due to the roar of gasoline-powered landscape equipment, especially leaf blowers? In addition to the harmful exhaust fumes it creates, it is loud and obnoxious. I live on small cul-de-sac in Lake Oswego with nine houses. It is usually quiet and peaceful, until landscapers arrive to our neighbor's home and to the nearby apartment complex and the peace is rudely interrupted by leaf blowers from the early morning and continues into the afternoon, even on Saturdays. At the apartment complex the gardeners use four leaf blowers at the same time!

The gasoline-powered leaf blowers generate carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxide from the oil-gas mixture that fuel them. These noxious fumes trigger allergies and aggravate asthma while also contributing to chronic lung obstruction and heart disease. Instead of gasoline powered machines to gather leaves, why not use rakes, brooms or perhaps electric leaf blowers? For years we have been using electric equipment and manual methods, both of which are substantially quieter and cleaner to operate while accomplishing the same work.

I am pleased to see the city of Portland passed a ban on gas-powered leaf blowers starting in 2026. What is stopping the city of Lake Oswego from doing the same? We all want to live in a quiet community surrounded by a healthy environment, but instead, we allow gasoline-powered landscaping equipment with its excessive noise to add stress to the community and negatively impact our health through airborne dirt and debris.

Elena King
Lake Oswego

Mansfield, David. "OPINION: Frustrated about leaf blowers." *Lake Oswego Review (OR)*, sec. Opinion, 4 Dec. 2024.

Frustrated about leaf blowers

I am a resident on Crest Drive in Lake Oswego, and I'd like to express my frustration regarding the overuse of gas-powered landscape equipment in my neighborhood, and beyond.

There are occasions when three or four blowers are operating in my immediate vicinity. I would not fault you to think I am exaggerating ... but I am not. A couple of the commercial landscapers will run multiple blowers at once. The experience is overwhelming.

I find the noise aggravating, but I am also concerned about the environment and overuse of gas-powered leaf blowers in particular. I observe that professional landscapers rely on leaf blowers to "rake" the lawn, doing irreparable damage to air quality and soil-based critical habitat.

Personally, I would ban all blowers, including gas and electric-powered machines. I recognize this is highly unlikely. I rake my leaves into my garden spaces, with minimal effort, no leaf disposal required, while facilitating healthy soil regeneration and compost for my plants. There is really no need for a blower on my half acre. Occasionally, I will use my electric blower to "finish off" the lawn debris residual after raking. I recognize that is not ideal, but a much better solution than "power-washing" the lawn and its soil with a destructive high velocity and toxic gas-powered blower.

Thank you for taking the time to read my concerns.

David Manfield
Lake Oswego

Peterson, Tate. "OPINION: Gas-powered leaf blowers harm environment, neighbors." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 4 Dec. 2024.

Gas-powered leaf blowers harm environment, neighbors

I live in the Palisades neighborhood of Lake Oswego. I'm tired of the constant noise and fumes from gas-powered landscape equipment.

The use of gas-powered landscape equipment, especially blowers, is harmful to the people operating it and their neighbors. They produce exhaust fumes with high levels of known carcinogens like benzene, butadiene, formaldehyde and fine particulates that are associated with respiratory, cardiovascular and neurological harm. They send dust into the air that can contain pollen, mold, animal feces, heavy metals and chemicals from herbicides and pesticides. The high-decibel, low-frequency noise they generate causes hearing loss. It travels farther and penetrates walls more than higher pitched sounds. In a neighborhood like mine, a single gas-powered leaf blower can negatively impact up to 90 surrounding homes.

Luckily, there's an easy solution. I use rakes and brooms. Additionally, I leave the leaves in landscaped areas, where they retain moisture in the soil, decompose to provide nutrients for the trees and plants, act as a springtime weed suppressant, and provide critical habitat for pollinators like bees and butterflies.

If I need a power tool, I use electric ones and I am happy with them. They're exponentially quieter, cleaner and healthier. Doing so has benefited my health, my neighborhood and the environment.

Tate Peterson
Lake Oswego

Melissa, Rachel. "OPINION: Let leaves nourish the soil." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 4 Dec. 2024.

Let leaves nourish soil

I live in the Palisades neighborhood of Lake Oswego. Nearly every day, especially during the fall months, I hear a droning chorus of loud and obtrusive gas-powered leaf blowers coming from every direction. Not only are these blowers noisy and disruptive, but they pose significant health risks to the people using them and destroy precious habitat for the small wildlife residing in the leaves. According to the Xerces Society, "A layer of leaves is vital insulation from the cold for the many animals that hide within (or in the soil beneath), like quite a few butterflies. Others, like many native bees, nest within stems, flower heads, or pieces of wood." See xerces.org/blog/leave-the-leaves.

I would like to strongly encourage my neighbors and the wider community to stop using gas-powered leaf blowers. Instead, please leave the leaves where they are so they can nourish the soil. Certainly, sidewalks and streets should be cleared, but that can easily be accomplished with a rake, broom, or — if necessary — an electric leaf blower.

Rachel Melissa
Lake Oswego

Berridge, Tom. "OPINION: People who use gas leaf blowers aren't being good neighbors." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 30 Oct. 2024.

People who use gas leaf blowers aren't being good neighbors

Today as once again I was kept hostage in my own home by growling monsters known as leaf blowers, a perfect solution to this outrage rose up in my noise-addled mind: I am going to stop picking up my dog's poop. In case the correlation isn't immediately obvious, let me explain.

People who use gas blowers increase the efficiency of their yard care by toisting on their neighbors the cost of that efficiency in the form of noise and fumes. They save time and money, and people who go outside or open their windows pay in auditory torture. Good deal, right?

Now to the scatological part. For years I have been following my pooch around the neighborhood picking up her excretions and even picking up fecal matter left by dogs of less conscientious owners. I thought I was being a good citizen, but now I realize I was being a chump. I can be like my neighbors and gain personal efficiency and value at their expense. I can walk my dog and not have to pick up smelly poop and carry it around with me. I can just leave the steaming mess on their lawn.

The city council may someday quell my disgusting rampage by banning gas blowers, but mean-while, you folks with the pristine yards have been warned - it's no more Mr. Nice Guy! Are you ready to roll, puppy?

Tom Berridge
Lake Oswego

Cadish, Barry & Melissa. "OPINION: Council shut down pickleball – why not gas landscaping equipment?." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 23 Oct. 2024.

Council shut down pickleball — why not gas landscaping equipment?

Hear that noise? It's the piercing sound of gas-powered landscape equipment overpowering our city. In the Uplands neighborhood of Lake Oswego, where we live, gas-powered blowers are particularly deafening, especially when several landscape companies use them simultaneously.

In terms of air pollution, they produce exhaust fumes with elevated levels of known carcinogens like benzene, butadiene, formaldehyde and fine particulates that are associated with respiratory, cardiovascular, and neurological harm. The high-decibel, low-frequency noise they generate causes hearing loss. It travels farther and penetrates walls more than higher pitched sounds. In a neighborhood like ours, a single gas-powered leaf blower can negatively impact up to 90 surrounding homes.

Speaking of noise, Lake Oswego City Council — without hesitation — shut down the one-and-only pickleball court in town due to noise concerns from neighbors. Really? The noise from pickleball paddles is a fraction of the 70 - 100 db blaring from backpack-style leaf blowers. For these reasons, we strongly urge City Council to take action and ban gas-powered equipment from further use.

We use an electric blower and a battery-operated chain saw, both of which are exponentially quieter, cleaner and healthier. Doing so has benefited my neighborhood and the environment and will improve the quality of life in our city.

Barry and Melissa Cadish
Lake Oswego

Ripsam, Stefan. "OPINION: City should mandate electric leaf blowers." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 16 Oct. 2024.

City should mandate electric leaf blowers

My family moved here for the great schools, safety and for the perceived tranquility. We found the schools to be great, the community to be safe and the environment to be pleasant — well, so long as nobody is blasting a gas leaf blower in our near vicinity — which is sadly nearly every daylight hour of every nice day, year round.

When we searched for homes, common listing adjectives were “tranquil” or “quiet street.” Since peaceful enjoyment of one’s home and community is not a controversial idea, it would seem incongruent to have left the landscaping industry completely unregulated. The most common thing I see is somebody blowing dust and debris (not even leaves most of the year) away from a property that they are “landscaping.”

The status quo of rampant gas leaf blower use is simply not worth it. Nice yards existed long before gas leaf blowers and they will exist long after them. If there is a machine in everyday use that creates more external harm than a gas leaf blower, I’d like to know what it is. Gas leaf blowers damage hearing, steal peaceful enjoyment of residents, pollute with shockingly high emissions, pollute by atomizing dust, feces and spores into the air we breathe, contribute to soil erosion, hurt pollinators like bees and they hurt the health of the workers. Electric blowers, used wisely, solve most or all of the issues above. I hope that Lake Oswego City Council will switch to an electric mandate for the good of all.

Stefan Ripsam
Lake Oswego

Black, David. "OPINION: Time to switch to electric lawn equipment." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 9 Oct. 2024.

Time to switch to electric lawn equipment

We are a retired couple who moved from Alaska to Lake Oswego in 2014 to escape the increasing winter ice and resultant broken bones. We left the raw beauty of the Greatland for the landscaped beauty of Lake Oswego with its beautiful big old trees.

On most mornings I sit in a rocking chair with my dog in my lap, viewing the trees, shrubs, flowers, birds and bees. It's a beautiful time of day complimented by the sound of songbirds and crows. Life is bliss. That is, until sometime after 8 a.m. on a weekday and some Saturdays.

The roar of one, two, three, even four gas-powered leaf blowers frequently dominate the solitude. They are so loud that I have been on the phone with a family member who will say "What's that noise? I cannot hear you!" I am usually forced inside to escape it, spoiling a beautiful start to the morning. I have talked to neighbors who have switched to electric equipment and found them much quieter and less obnoxious. They say the loss of power by going electric has a minor effect on the speed and efficiency of leaf blowing at a typical neighborhood landscape.

Also, leaving leaves in our garden beds will lessen the need to blow leaves (see oswegowatershed.org/leave-the-leaves).

I hope my neighbors will join me in asking the Lake Oswego City Council to ban gas leaf blowers in Lake Oswego neighborhoods

David Black
Lake Oswego

Sulaski, Cynthia. "OPINION: Gas-powered lawn equipment should be banned." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 4 Sep. 2024.

Gas-powered lawn equipment should be banned

Results from the 2023 Lake Oswego Community Survey identified five priorities that survey participants wanted the city to emphasize in the next two years. The top one was its efforts to respond to climate change. Although the city has made significant changes in its operations (e.g., transitioning to electric vehicles and landscaping equipment), respondents thought more should be done.

I have a recommendation to the city that dovetails with those survey results and Lake Oswego's Sustainability and Climate Action Plan. Ban gas-powered landscaping equipment. Start with gas leaf blowers. In a recent study, 30 minutes of yardwork using a two-stroke leaf blower was equal to driving a Ford F150 Raptor from North Texas to Anchorage: 23 times the carbon monoxide and 300 times more hydrocarbons (cited in edmunds.com).

Over 100 U.S. cities have already transitioned away from using gas-powered landscaping equipment in some way, so it's not a new idea. But the rewards would be immediate: reduced noise and air pollution for Lake Oswego residents and for lawncare employees who actually do the work.

Until, and if, Lake Oswego City Council declares a ban on gas-powered leaf blowers, homeowners can take action now. Transition to electric equipment for your own property. If you pay for lawncare, offer to purchase electric equipment for your service provider to use. Or team up with your neighbors to buy and share equipment for your lawncare businesses to use. Let's not delay. It's time to make the change for everyone's health and well-being.

Cynthia Sulaski
Lake Oswego

Schmidt, Diana. "OPINION: Our air, our health." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 4 Sep. 2024.

Our air, our health

Gas-powered leaf blowers are so loud and ubiquitous they've become impossible to ignore. Originally developed as a way to save water in drought-impacted landscapes, they're now impossible to escape and have become the soundtrack of our lives.

But they aren't just noisy. Their emissions are toxic. Those small combustion engines produce exhaust fumes high in benzene, butadiene, formaldehyde and fine particulates; known carcinogens associated with respiratory, cardiovascular and neurological harm.

We all suffer from their use. If the noise doesn't make you run around closing your windows, the dangerous emissions should. Yet it's the operators who are affected most. Prolonged use, day after day, year upon year, most negatively impacts those that are using them. The hazardous emissions are inhaled and also accumulate on clothing, exposing their homes and families to the same. Those with less economic power or fewer resources suffer disproportionately.

Their use should be prohibited. It's an issue of public health. And those who make their living caring for our yards shouldn't be expected to bear the financial burden of transitioning an entire industry away from harmful equipment and practices. If we really care about those who work for and with us (DEI...?) we must share in that investment. Whether via personal action, legislation, public funds, or all three, we must take collective action to end their use. This is about the air we all breathe, the health of our children and the well-being of all those we purport to care about.

Diana Schmidt
Lake Oswego

Puhlman, Mark & Kathleen Wiens. "CITIZEN'S VIEW: Electrifying your landscaping: It's clean, it's quiet, it's healthy." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 4 Sep. 2024.

Electrifying your landscaping: It's clean, it's quiet, it's healthy **Mark Puhlman and Kathleen Wiens**

Imagine. Your husband, your wife, your son or your daughter loves the outdoors. They love working with their hands, working in the garden to help things grow. This is their passion and happens to be their livelihood. They are landscaping professionals. To pursue their passion they are often exposed to toxic fumes, lung-destroying chemicals and sounds so loud that they damage hearing. What would you do?

We do not have to imagine. Gas-powered landscaping equipment exposes them to low-frequency and high-decibel noise. The noise of a gas-powered blower is significantly louder than electric. It permeates walls and negatively impacts up to 90 surrounding homes. The noise contributes to hearing loss, high blood pressure and stress. Gardening professionals are exposed to such toxic conditions every workday.

Two-stroke engines burn a mixture of gasoline and oil. They produce exhaust fumes laden with high levels of benzene, butadiene, formaldehyde and fine particulates which are known carcinogens that are associated with respiratory, cardiovascular and neurological harm. For their size, gas landscaping equipment is extraordinarily polluting and unhealthy. Toxic waste, CO₂ and smog-forming emissions from these engines harm ecosystems and contribute to the climate crisis. Gas leaf blowers create up to 200 mph wind force which sends dust that can contain pollen, mold, animal feces, heavy metals and chemicals from herbicides and pesticides into the air.

We do not have to jeopardize our gardeners, habitat, wildlife and neighborhoods. Electric landscaping equipment is as powerful as its gas-powered counterparts. Electric equipment is cheaper to run and does not require the maintenance that gas-powered counterparts require. In addition, brooms and rakes do the job that gas-powered blowers do with less damage to the environment and our health.

What can we do as consumers to alleviate these dangers? We can leave the leaves in garden beds and use brooms and rakes when possible. For big jobs, we can use electric blowers and lawnmowers. We can plant more native plants and have less lawn. We can hire landscapers who use electric instead of gas-powered equipment. We can ask our current landscapers to go electric when possible. We can purchase electric landscape equipment and ask the landscapers to use our equipment. We can adopt a landscaper, and buy the equipment for them to use on your and your neighbors' property.

What have local, state and federal governments done to assist in the transition to electric landscape equipment? California and Portland, along with more than 200 municipalities across the nation, have implemented various types of bans and ordinances on gas-powered leaf blowers. Some have developed financial programs to help landscaping businesses buy the new equipment and infrastructure to support it. The local, state and federal governments have a responsibility to protect the health and safety of their citizenry. They have developed construction codes to make buildings

safer. They have required safety belts for cars and helmets for motorcycle riders. They have implemented regulations regarding smoking and secondhand smoke exposure. The improved social health and welfare of these regulations outweigh any added cost.

Lake Oswego Sustainability Network (LOSN) has launched a campaign to support healthy yard care practices and the transition away from gas-powered landscaping equipment. Your participation is important to the success of our campaign. Here are ways you can help us expedite the transition away from gas-powered landscaping equipment and toward more healthy and sustainable practices:

- Join the Electrify Your Landscaping and Healthy Yard Care Committee (kwiens@losn.org)
- Write a letter to the editor (mpuhlman@losn.org)
- Donate to LOSN (select “Electrify Your Landscaping project”)
- For additional information go to: <https://losn.org/project/electric-landscaping/>

Mark Puhlman and Kathleen Wiens are Lake Oswego Sustainability Network board members.

Wosko, Betsy. "OPINION: Gas leaf blowers need to be regulated." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 31 Jul. 2024.

Gas leaf blowers need to be regulated

It astonishes me that the City of Lake Oswego does not (or at least not yet) have the will to ban gas leaf blowers. Isn't government's primary obligation to defend its citizens, including from their own injurious habits? We ban smoking within so many feet of schools and public buildings; yet we leave unregulated carcinogen-belching, toxin-aerosolizing, soil-dessicating, blood-pressure-spiking, cacophonous, discombobulating and deafening gas blowers that are orders of magnitude worse.

I believe gas leaf blowers exist mainly because of status quo bias. Unfortunately, the status quo for most landscaping businesses is poison (herbicides, insecticides, etc.), noise and air pollution (gas blowers), and soil desiccation (blowers). We must change this heavy-handed landscaping paradigm, preferably voluntarily through consumer demand; but by regulation if necessary.

And regulation is necessary, considering the hugely adverse health and environmental impacts and risks of blowers. Gas blower use, further, is inconsistent with diversity, equity and inclusivity principles, as, among other things, paying a landscaper to self-inflict hearing loss and cancer is not loving. Our local governments and representatives in Salem should immediately, comprehensively and proactively ban gas blowers and otherwise stand up for the environment instead of being reactionary, letting citizens and nonprofits do the heavy lifting and taking half-measures. Our environment and its inhabitants, human and non-human, need a much stronger, sympathetic voice from our elected officials; and banning gas blowers should be an easy place to start.

Betsy Wosko
Lake Oswego

Pulhman, Mark. "OPINION: Gas-powered leaf blower problem has easy solution." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 10 Jul. 2024.

Gas-powered leaf blower problem has easy solution

I live in the Forest Highlands Neighborhood of Lake Oswego and sit on the FHNA Board as well as the Sustainability Advisory Board (SAB) of Lake Oswego and the Lake Oswego Sustainability Network (LOSN). I've been so discouraged by the constant noise and fumes from gas-powered landscape equipment. The use of gas-powered landscape equipment, especially blowers, is harmful to the people operating it. They produce exhaust fumes with high levels of known carcinogens like benzene, butadiene, formaldehyde, and fine particulates associated with respiratory, cardiovascular, and neurological harm.

They send dust into the air that can contain pollen, mold, animal feces, heavy metals, and chemicals from herbicides and pesticides. The high-decibel, low-frequency noise they generate causes hearing loss. The noise travels farther and penetrates walls more easily than higher-pitched sounds.

Happily, there's an easy solution. I use rakes and brooms. I leave the leaves in landscaped areas, where they retain moisture in the soil, decompose to provide nutrients for the trees and plants, act as a springtime weed suppressant, and provide critical habitat for pollinators like bees and butterflies. I have purchased an electric lawn mower and trimmer. I have been extremely satisfied with their performance. They're exponentially quieter, cleaner, and healthier. Doing so has benefited me, my neighborhood, and the environment.

I personally encourage the City of Lake Oswego to follow the lead of Portland and ban gas-powered leaf blowers in our city.

Dr. Mark Puhlman DNP
Lake Oswego

Adatto, Lisa. "OPINION: Time to transition to electric landscaping equipment." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 10 Jul. 2024.

Time to transition to electric landscaping equipment

We have an opportunity to improve our quality of life and make our future better: we can switch from gas-powered landscaping equipment to electric. We are all aware of the rising problems caused by climate change and air pollution. I was surprised to learn how dirty gas lawn equipment is — one use of a gas-powered lawn mower is equivalent to driving a gas-powered car 300 miles. Leaf blowers are worse. Once you transition to electric equipment, your landscaping care is quieter, cleaner, and healthier. Ask your contractors to make the switch or use your own electric equipment. Electricity is the way to power the future.

Lisa Adatto
Lake Oswego Sustainability Network

Wagner, Stephanie. "OPINION: Healthy soil and leaf blowers – not a match." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 10 Jul. 2024.

Healthy soil and leaf blowers — not a match

Recently, Mary's Woods residents participated in a Soil Your Undies event at their complex. Participants buried 100% cotton briefs around their campus. They were surprised to find that the soil in their garden beds was not very healthy. Healthy soil has a complex of microorganisms that love to eat the cotton in the briefs. When their briefs were exhumed they were practically intact — there was nothing in the soil to eat them. The beds are covered with a thick layer of bark dust which makes it easy to use gas powered leaf blowers to keep the beds "clean" of debris but doesn't help the soil.

Landscaping that promotes the use of gas-powered leaf blowers is detrimental to both a healthy, resilient garden and clean air. Think of taking a walk in the woods. The soil is covered with herbaceous plants, leaves compost in place, and no one turns the soil. Natural systems flourish and the soil is full of beneficial microbes that make fertilizer for the plants and help with water retention. No need for leaf blowers. The one pair of undies at Mary's Woods that was completely eaten was buried in an undisturbed natural area.

Mary's Woods residents are exploring ways to improve their soil. Stay tuned for what happens next year. And check out how to promote healthy soil at www.oswegowatershed.org/explore-the-watershed/soil-health/.

We all need healthy and resilient gardens — which start with the soil.

Stephanie Wagner
Lake Oswego

Kroenberg, Jim. "OPINION: Lake Oswego's City Council is ignoring environmental issues." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 25 Oct. 2023.

Lake Oswego's City Council is ignoring environmental issues

Council is ignoring environmental issues

Apparently the City Council doesn't read your newspaper. A couple of weeks ago Betty Wasko pleaded that it do something about gasoline powered leaf blowers. This issue has a letter from Zena Polly, saying (accurately) they adversely affect our health and the environment. I'm not surprised the council has done nothing. Months ago I wrote the Mayor about them and didn't even receive the courtesy of a response. I intend to do the same thing when he runs for any office in the future. These machines need to go.

Meanwhile, the council declines to do anything about the profligate tree destruction. There's the debacle on Bryant, but nobody seemed to notice when dozens of 150-year-old firs disappeared on the west end of Upper Drive. Something needs to be done and perhaps referenda on both issues are in order.

Here's the thing: leaf blowers pollute the environment; trees remove harmful pollutants from the air. So get rid of those pesky trees and have more leaf blowers driving everybody nuts. How would you like Phoenix temperatures from May to October? There is a simple remedy to the leaf blowers. I have one that generates a 300 mph windstream. It doesn't pollute. Nobody hears it but me and my next door neighbor. Oh, the paper also has a story about the Lake Oswego Tree Summit on Nov. 4. I wonder if any members of the city council will be there. I am reminded of voices crying in the wilderness.

Jim Kronenberg
Lake Oswego

Polly, Zena. "OPINION: Why isn't Lake Oswego City Council taking action on leaf blowers?." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 18 Oct. 2023.

Why isn't Lake Oswego City Council taking action on leaf blowers?

Action on gas leaf blowers is overdue

Reducing our tolerance for gas-powered leaf blowers (Betsy Wasko, "My View", 9/22/23) is a practice long overdue.

I would like to hear our city council's justification for failing to take a stand on these tools that clearly and directly harm our community's health and environment. How does the city maintain its espoused values with a straight face while allowing this practice to continue?

If we are a city that is passionate about our trees and natural environment, it appears shortsighted to stop paying attention when it comes to what we need to do to be responsible stewards of that environment. There are many options and alternatives. Please, council members, take this seriously or convene a group of residents who actually do care about air and noise pollution.

Zena Polly
Lake Oswego

Wosko, Betsy. "CITIZEN'S VIEW: Time to get rid of gas-powered leaf blowers." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 20 Sep. 2023.

Time to get rid of gas-powered leaf blowers
Betsy Wosko

So I was trying to relax last Sunday when I was treated to a 4-hour Devil's Symphony in Chaos Major. Four separate gas blowing crews, back-to-back-to-back-to-back. When the cacophony ended, I could still smell gasoline from blocks away.

The Lake Oswego City Council will not act in banning or limiting leaf blowers. Why, I don't know; these devices are highly injurious to the health of the operators, the majority of whom are minority and economically disadvantaged. One would think diversity, equity and inclusion principles would require immediate action. But for whatever reason, perhaps fear of regulating businesses, that hasn't happened. I therefore ask everyone to please, without guidance or instruction from our local government, drastically reduce use of blowers or eliminate them entirely.

According to a 2017 study, the low-frequency, wall-penetrating sound that blowers emit, even from many homes away, is well over the decibel level considered safe by the World Health Organization. For the operators themselves, blowers blast up to 112 dB. By comparison, a plane taking off generates 105 dB.

Obnoxiously noisy environments can cause both mental and physical disease, causing or contributing to hearing loss, tinnitus, hypertension and stress. The emissions from burning and from incomplete combustion are probable carcinogens and known respiratory irritants.

I feel it is unconscionable that many people instruct "landscaping" crews to use blowers every week, year-round, putting all at risk and shattering the peace of our neighborhoods. Most of the time, they are blowing bare pavement. The rest of the time, they are often directing their hurricane-force winds at soil, killing microorganisms and insects and turning the soil to dust.

This "landscape theater" must end. Please stop it with the blowers; leave the leaves on the soil to give our precious environment a fighting chance; stop using herbicides and other poisons; and use a broom.

Betsy Wosko is a Lake Oswego resident.

Wosko, Betsy. "OPINION: How racquetball relates to our environmental struggle." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 3 Mar. 2021.

How racquetball relates to our environmental struggle **Betsy Wosko**

If you are like me, you may find yourself confounded and in despair about why so many people are so rapacious with our environment. We cut down so many old trees, which we can ill afford to do so because of climate change and for many other reasons. We use pesticides, insecticides and herbicides, and pretend they are safe, which is simply the height of stupidity, irresponsibility and self-delusion. We overuse leaf blowers, which kill insects, desiccate the soil, contribute pollutants (if gas powered) and are an acoustic assault. One may make a compelling argument that killing a mature tree, using -icides and using leaf blowers should be a crime. Yet the behavior persists. Witnessing our heavy hand with our environment and its inhabitants, human and nonhuman, can be dispiriting, if not overwhelming, for anyone with a capacity for even rudimentary logic, compassion and ethics.

But environmental Bravehearts, worry no more! I have a solution. And it has to do with restringing a racquetball racquet.

Now, one can play racquetball generally with a power game or a finesse game. When restringing one's racquet, if one prefers a power game, e.g., drive serves and passing shots, one may desire less tension on the strings. That is because the ball will rebound with greater force off a lax string than a taut string because the lax strings will stretch on impact and store energy and then return that energy with the rebound. If, however, one prefers a finesse game, e.g., lob serves and drop shots, one might string a racquet more tightly, as the ball will be on the strings for a shorter time, minimizing the deleterious effect of racquet rotation and perhaps resulting in better control. Or perhaps the tautly-strung player simply thinks she has better control and then, confident and emboldened, makes it so. Either way, better control.

Some environmental activists are lax strings, who store energy and hit hard; others, taut strings, who are more precise and methodical. Both approaches are necessary in any civil rights movement. And make no mistake: our environment is a civil rights issue, and very much an issue concerning diversity, equity and inclusivity.

Lax strings among us must call for a moratorium on cutting down old trees, banning all -icides and banning leaf blowers. Taut strings among us must call for many and increasing incremental measures to forestall the myriad assaults we are making against our precious environment. The answer, I think, may be found in a balanced game: a balanced, aggressive game which is on the offense; and designed, with determination, to win.

As we soon shall win.

Betsy Wosko is a Lake Oswego resident.

Hawley, Doug. "OPINION: Looking for candidates who will support residents." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 23 Sep. 2020.

Looking for candidates who will support residents
Doug Hawley

Election time comes around again. I would like to support candidates that support local residents, someone in favor of helping the residents of Lake Oswego and Clackamas in general with their quality of life and finances.

It is too late, but I'd want someone who was against the poorly planned water project. During the project Lake Oswego irritated West Linn to the extent that friends of ours left town. West Linn needed to be bribed to let the project go forward. After a long period, too long, of disruption, we have doubled water rates. That was supposed to be all right because we pay twice as often. Now there is more than we will ever need unless developers find a way to use the excess while degrading our traffic and air with increased housing and cars.

Currently roads all over Lake Oswego are being flagged or closed. Add to that the long term projects both north and south on Boones Ferry. I like the elimination of the culvert, but I doubt that the irritation and expense of the Lake Grove part will ever be justified. The Mercantile Project goes on and on. Not long ago Terwilliger was closed at the south end.

It probably only seems that the schools are regularly being rebuilt and in the case of the high schools, not well.

The construction on Mercantile, City Hall, Boones Ferry and various McMansions may be finished sometime, but will stretch well into the future. Frequent utility work is added to that.

A real boon would be a prohibition of gas leaf blowers. We think of them as the Devil's Tool (yes, a double entendre). Polluting, loud and unnecessary.

Those things are costing a lot of money and inconvenience. Construction gangs are taking up on street parking. Suggestion — hit stop or at least pause. When the long list of projects is done, don't take on anything which is not absolutely necessary. Stop new developments by withholding approval or not allowing new hookups. Find a way to stop annual increases in property taxes and utility fees. Both are too high. Cease bond renewals.

I'd like to live long enough to enjoy living here again and be able to drive short distances without flaggers, closed or beat up roads. Are there any politicians in favor of the residents?

Let's hear from you.

Doug Hawley is a Lake Oswego resident.

Wosko, Betsy. "CITIZEN'S VIEW: New nonprofit is Beyond Stupid." Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 27 Dec. 2018.

New nonprofit is Beyond Stupid **Betsy Wosko**

The mission of Beyond Stupid is to wage war against our environment and its inhabitants

I don't know about you, but I'm sick of liberal environmental and animal rights activists and tired of their expressed or implied moralistic judgments. To try to muffle the incessant whining of these irritating, insufferable tree-huggers, I decided to found a nonprofit of my own called Beyond Stupid.

The mission of Beyond Stupid is to wage war against our environment and its inhabitants and help us realize Rachel Carson's prophecy from 56 years ago of a "silent spring" — and beyond! Among other things, we at Beyond Stupid encourage the use of pesticides, herbicides and insecticides and two-stroke, gas-powered leaf blowers. We also provide incentives for the consumption of meat and dairy and for cutting down old trees.

I am proud of the collaboration B.S. has had with major institutions, such as organized religion, which provides the role, vital for any evil to take root and flourish, of mainly remaining silent; Monsanto and Dow, which have skillfully depleted the soil of its minerals and the plants of their natural pollinators; landscapers (except those crazy outliers who do not use herbicides and power tools), who have been our loyal street-corner drug dealers; and our government, at all levels, which has kindly stood by without interference to watch the catastrophe unfold.

I would be remiss to not give a shout-out to Beyond Stupid's esteemed advisory board, which includes Monsanto, Dow, most church leaders, dairy and meat producers, hunting and fishing advocates, animal experimenters, most landscapers, "pest" control companies that use lethal methods, Satan and the Trump administration. With their input and good work, we are ossifying hearts and indoctrinating minds through the habitual practice of violence against the environment (our common home) and its inhabitants (our human and non-human brethren) and perpetuating memes which have set us squarely on a collision course with Armageddon and given God cause to question, as He has since the time of Cain, "What have you done? Your brother's blood cries to Me from the ground."

Beyond Stupid still has work to do. Over the past 40 years, humans have wiped out about 60 percent of the world's fish, birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles; that means we have 40 percent to go. Recent reports in the New York Times and Washington Post estimate that 75 percent of the biomass of insects is gone; we have 25 percent to go there.

In Lake Oswego, some old trees still stand. They should all be cut down. Lastly, 100 percent of the human population does not yet have diabetes, cancer or neurological disorders such as Alzheimer's or autism.

At Beyond Stupid, we will lobby hard to be sure kids are fed meat and dairy for their school lunches and that parks are regularly sprayed with Monsanto or Dow's poison du jour. Hopefully, soon, we will achieve 100 percent or close to it of a very sick population eating synthetic food and deprived forever of the company of insects, then birds and on across the delicate ecoladder until soon thereafter, with the last person turning off the last light, we will add humanity to the list of those extinct.

It's not too late.

Betsy Wosko is a resident of Lake Oswego.

Block, Audrey. "CITIZEN'S VIEW: City needs clear and measurable noise standards" Lake Oswego Review (OR), sec. Opinion, 29 Sep. 2016.

City needs clear and measurable noise standards **Audrey Block**

Every day, for as long as 10 hours a day, my neighbor's outdoor swimming pool heater violates Oregon Department of Environmental Quality standards for noise.

In Portland and Tigard and Ashland, the level of noise is a violation. In New York City, it's a violation. My neighbor would be cited and, if the nuisance continued, fined, with the threat of further monetary damages awarded in civil court.

In Lake Oswego, it's perfectly acceptable.

Here, the Municipal Code says it's unlawful to continuously create sound that is "loud, disturbing, and unnecessary." But there are no measurable limits for noise. It's all subjective. Inspectors don't collect decibel readings. They don't even submit to hearing tests that measure how well they can perceive sound. If a piece of mechanical equipment is properly installed, within the required zoning setback and superficially performing to industry standards, it's not a problem.

When I hired an acoustical engineer to conduct a sound test in my yard, the pool heater hit 62 decibels. That is 17 decibels higher, or about twice as loud, as what's allowed in any neighborhood in Portland. If you download a free app that installs a decibel meter on your phone and measure the sound coming from a leaf blower or lawnmower, you can hear what 62 decibels sounds like. It's noise that pours through sealed doors and windows. It carries across houses and trees and fences and can still be heard a block away from its source.

When I complained to Lake Oswego government, the on-site experts for assessing the problem — who included a member of the company that designed and installed the pool — said the heater was running properly. Imagine listening to a leaf blower for hours and hours each day, every day of the year, and being told, as I was, that you can take your complaint to civil court.

It costs several hundred dollars to buffer the sound coming from a pool heater. It costs between \$50,000 and \$70,000 to pursue a case like mine in court. It's a gamble to ask a judge to intervene where a city chooses not to. Even with a win, attorney's fees are not recoverable.

As density increases, the borders between neighbors narrow and the officials responsible for overseeing change can glide away from the responsibility of managing problems. We're still living with rules that were shaped in a different era, when it wasn't possible that a new, uninsulated, 71-decibel air conditioner could be installed five feet from your bedroom window. Or, a food cart pod could be proposed without explicit limits on noise from generators.

I appreciate that a problem like mine isn't a terrible one to have. It points out the wealth of this community, and the comforts we anticipate by living here. In other areas of oversight, Lake Oswego government has done a fine job of balancing priorities for quality of life, development and the preservation of nature.

And yet, when it comes to noise, I'd be better off living near Times Square.

This fall, I want to hear from candidates who value the property rights of citizens seeking peace and quiet over the rights of persistent noisemakers. Then, I'd like to see city government work with the community to establish clear and objective noise standards in both the Municipal and Development Codes.

Lake Oswego resident Audrey Block is a writer and member of the Lake Oswego Neighborhood Action Coalition.

Editor's note: *The Review asked Bill Youngblood, the City's code enforcement specialist, to respond to this Citizen's View; here's what he had to say:*

"Lake Oswego's nuisance regulations establish unlawful noise as sounds that are loud, disturbing and unnecessary. The regulations also list specific noise prohibitions for certain objects or activities, such as animals, mechanical devices, construction, groups of people, etc.

"The City investigated the letter writer's pool heater noise complaint at length and determined the noise to be necessary and reasonable. The building housing the pool equipment met setbacks from property lines; the equipment met requirements for building, electrical and plumbing codes; the pool heater was tested and found to be operating within the designed parameters of the manufacturer; and excessive noise was not observed.

The City approaches noise complaints between neighbors by describing the regulations that apply, and by starting a dialogue to find common ground and offer solutions. The goal is to help neighbors find a solution that both parties feel is fair; however, that is not always achieved.

The nuisance regulations do not contain specific sound thresholds stated in decibels; however, by not having a rigid threshold, the City has flexibility in responding to a noise complaint by considering context, duration, etc., and most importantly if the sounds are necessary or reasonable.

Kanitz, Syd. "Let's make Lake Oswego a leaf-blower-free city." Lake Oswego Review (OR) , sec. Opinion, 15 Aug. 2013.

Let's make Lake Oswego a leaf-blower-free city **Syd Kanitz**

Nature's delivered Lake Oswego a long, warm summer and residents are relishing the outdoor life.

But quiet has not come with summer days. Leaf blowers have revved up with a vengeance. In both public and private places in the downtown area and elsewhere, leaf blowers have transmitted ear-splitting noise, fumes and polluting dust during an especially dry summer. There are few days when leaf blowers aren't in action.

"Hello LO's" monthly newsletter article, "Blowers, Mowers and Other Noise" says the city has received many noise complaints, a number of which resulted in police responses. The article points to the city ordinance on specific prohibitive noise which, in part, states: "The use of any mechanical device, operated by compressed air, steam, gasoline or otherwise, unless the noise created thereby is effectively muffled."

Of all modern contrivances we've learned to live with in this noisy world we've created, gasoline-powered leaf blowers rank at the top of anti-nature devices. They originated in Japan in the 1960s to disperse pesticides on fields and trees. That led to their modified use as a tool for eliminating garden debris.

When leaf blowers arrived in California, Carmel-by-the-Sea and Beverly Hills were the first to ban them as noise polluters in 1975 and 1978. Currently, 20 California cities have banned leaf blowers while another 80 cities in the United States have ordinances restricting usage and/or noise level.

Complaints have circulated in our Lake Oswego condo complex about the use and abuse of leaf blowers. Their loud noise has disturbed some daytime meetings and workers in home offices have been unable to use their phones. Dirt, dust and debris have been blown onto lower-level condos. Residents have observed workers who let blowers continue to run as they walked from place to place, blowing debris back and forth at each other, and returning to places they had been already. Those with breathing problems have suffered from fumes that have entered living quarters, even with windows shut.

Leaf blowers are hazardous to our health. Wikipedia explores the environmental fallout of leaf blowers, stating the adverse health effects of carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, hydrocarbons and particulates generated in the exhaust gas of gasoline-powered engines. These raise dust clouds that contain harmful substances such as pesticides,

mold and animal fecal matter, leading to irritation, allergies and disease. Noise levels — well above required — can cause hearing loss to operators and those nearby.

When I approached one landscape service on the problem of leaf blowers, its owner shared the same concerns with guys overusing blowers. "It's something we all deal with in this industry. It comes down to training ... in the past I have even removed blowers from trucks to force guys to not overuse them."

He went on to say that "blowers are a useful and necessary tool especially in the fall, but I have witnessed firsthand too much blower use."

It's a general consensus with landscapers that the use of leaf blowers allows them to pass on savings to clients. However, it's been reported that in cities that have banned their use, no landscape businesses have gone out of business.

Lake Oswego has sometimes been compared to Carmel, Calif. Do we have the courage and will here to ban gasoline-operated leaf blowers and follow in that California city's progressive footsteps?

Syd Kanitz is a writer in and resident of Lake Oswego.