June 25, 2024

Dear Mayor Scott, Council President Mosby, Chair McCray, and members of Baltimore City Council,

We are writing to express our support for ordinance **23-0367, Prohibition: Gas-powered Debris Removal Equipment**. Gas-powered leaf blowers produce unsafe levels of air and noise pollution and with cleaner, quieter alternatives widely available, we no longer need to subject the citizens of Baltimore City to their harmful effects.

**Gas-powered Leaf Blowers Produce a Stunning Amount of Harmful Air Pollution!**

The chemicals emitted from gas leaf blowers (e.g. PM2.5, PM10, hydrocarbons, nitrogen oxides, benzene, butadiene, formaldehyde) have been linked to adverse health effects including cardiovascular disease, strokes, respiratory disease, lymphoma, leukemia, and other cancers, neurological disorders including autism, premature death and effects on prenatal development. This is particularly harmful for landscape workers and even people far from the working devices.



**One Hour of Use Driving 1,100 Miles**

Using **a gas-powered leaf blower for just one hour produces smog forming air pollution equivalent to driving a Toyota Camry 1,100 miles[[1]](#footnote-0) or from Baltimore to Miami**. Or thought of in another way, using a gas leaf blower for just 12 1⁄2 hours produces as much air pollution as the average Marylander driving 13,500 miles in a year.

Further, a **gas-powered leaf blower engine emits nearly 300 times the hydrocarbons of a F-150 Raptor pickup truck** and many times as much carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides[[2]](#footnote-1).

***Collectively, gas-powered lawn and garden equipment in Maryland produces air pollution equivalent to 6.4 million cars***.[[3]](#footnote-2) Maryland only has 5 million cars and light trucks registered. It’s hard to imagine that anyone could have designed a device to create more toxic pollution than a gas-powered leaf blower.

As one example of the health impact of air pollution, Baltimore has significantly higher rates of asthma. The hospitalization rate for asthma among adult residents (≥ 18 years) in Baltimore City was approximately 3.3 times higher than the hospitalization rate for Maryland adults causing trauma, health costs, and loss of work/school.[[4]](#footnote-3)

**Noise Pollution Harms Physical and Mental Health**

While most people are aware of the horrific noise from gas-powered leaf blowers, they may not be aware they are sufficiently loud to damage the hearing of the operators of these devices and distant bystanders in as little as 15 minutes of daily exposure. Frequently, this includes children and others who are not wearing hearing protection.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, hearing damage begins at around 85 decibels for extended exposure (2 hours or more) and **exposure to 100 decibels for just 15 minutes a day can lead to hearing loss.[[5]](#footnote-4)** Gas leaf blowers often generate 100-115 decibels of sound. Further, the sound wave pattern allows the sound to penetrate into our homes disrupting the ability to sleep, work, and concentrate and causes adverse impacts to physical and mental health.

**Over 300 cities and counties have passed bans on harmful gas-powered leaf blowers,** including Washington, D.C., and Montgomery County, Somerset, Chevy Chase, Hyattsville, Annapolis, and University Park, Maryland. Doesn’t Baltimore deserve cleaner air, too?

**Alternatives**

**Electric and battery operated leaf blowers are widely available, much quieter, comparable in device cost and *with far lower operating costs*, and are expected to outlast their gas-powered counterparts.** (Manufacturers’ warranty them for twice as long.) Battery operated leaf blowers use the same longlasting, 95% recyclable lithium batteries like those that power our phones and laptops and equipment batteries are frequently interchangeable with other similar devices (e.g. string trimmers).

It’s time to phase out these harmful polluters and restore some peace and quality of life to Baltimore. This ordinance will also help support Maryland’s Climate Solutions Now goals and Governor Moore’s efforts to cut emissions by 60% by 2031. While change is never easy, it’s a whole lot less expensive to get rid of gas leaf blowers than millions of cars.

Sincerely,

The Greater Baltimore Group of the Sierra Club

and Clean Water Action

CC:

Jennifer Kunze

Deontre Hayes

Natawna Austin

1. California Air Resources Board, CARB SORE Fact Sheet, <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/resources/fact-sheets/sore-small-engine-fact-sheet> [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Kavanagh, Jason. December 5, 2011, Emissions Test: Car vs. Truck vs. Leaf Blower. <https://www.edmunds.com/car-reviews/features/emissions-test-car-vs-truck-vs-leaf-blower.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Dutzik, Sokolow, Metzger, Schatz, *Lawn Care Goes Electric: Why it’s time to switch to a new generation of clean, quiet electric lawn equipment*, Oct. 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/mch/documents/asthma_control/Profile_BaltimoreCity.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. CDC, <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hearing_loss/what_noises_cause_hearing_loss.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)