



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION
Saving a National Treasure

June 24, 2024

Dear Chair McCray and Members of the Health, Environment, and Technology Committee:

On behalf of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and our more than 80,000 members in Maryland, I respectfully submit these comments in support of Bill #23-0367 (Prohibition - Gas-Powered Debris Removal Equipment) which aims to prohibit the use of gas-powered debris removal equipment in Baltimore City.

Gas-powered equipment threatens public and environmental health.

The combustion of fossil fuels releases gases into the air that harm public and environmental health, including carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas that traps heat and contributes to climate change, and nitrogen oxides, which contribute to the formation of smog and acid rain.¹ In addition, fossil-fuel powered equipment releases fine particulate matter into the air, which is linked to respiratory and reproductive ailments, and airborne volatile organic compounds produced by the equipment can trigger asthma attacks.²

Gas-powered leaf blowers use two-stroke engines, which are more polluting than engines in most of today's cars and trucks.³ Data released by the California Air Resources Board reveals that an hour's worth of gas-powered leaf blower use generates the same emissions as driving 1,100 miles, the distance between Baltimore and New Orleans, Louisiana.⁴

Air pollution does not remain solely in the air, but instead largely gets absorbed by our environment. One-third of the nitrogen pollution that ends up in the

¹ Environmental Protection Agency. (2023, November 29). *Sources and Solutions: Fossil Fuels*. EPA. <https://www.epa.gov/nutrientpollution/sources-and-solutions-fossil-fuels>

² Huxley-Reicher, B., Folger, M., & Casale, M. (2022, August 15). *Trouble in the Air*. Environment America. <https://environmentamerica.org/center/resources/trouble-in-the-air/>

³ Hufham, A. (2021, December 3). *Environmental Advisory Council talks leaf blowers*. Yale Daily News. <https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2021/12/03/environmental-advisory-council-talks-leaf-blowers/#:~:text=From%20an%20environmental%20standpoint%2C%20the.and%20potentially%20pollute%20water%20sources.>

⁴ SORE - *Small Engine Fact Sheet*. California Air Resources Board. (2021, December 15). <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/resources/fact-sheets/sore-small-engine-fact-sheet>

Chesapeake Bay comes from air pollution. This excess nitrogen fuels the growth of algae blooms in the water, creating low-oxygen “dead zones” that suffocate marine life.⁵ Maryland and the Bay watershed states collectively are not on track to meet targets for implementing pollution-reduction measures by 2025.⁶ Prohibitions on gas-powered equipment can help us reach these goals more quickly.

In addition to health impacts, gas-powered equipment causes social justice concerns. Those most affected by the emissions from gas-powered leaf blowers are landscaping workers, who work with gas-powered leaf blowers for many hours each day, and those suffering from respiratory illnesses.⁷ Baltimore residents already report high asthma rates and other respiratory issues due to emissions from the transportation sector, so reductions in exposure to toxic emissions from gas combustion is a positive step forward.⁸

Moreover, leaf blowers are dangerously loud, often generating roars up to 100 decibels, equivalent to a passenger jet taking off.⁹ Exposure to this noise can lead to hearing loss, difficulties with balance, high blood pressure, cardiac disease, insomnia and mental health disorders.¹⁰ One-quarter of Americans between ages 20 and 69 already suffer from diminished hearing due to urban noise like sirens, traffic, and leaf blowers.¹¹

There are effective alternatives to gas-powered equipment.

Landscape companies claim that electric leaf blowers are not as powerful as gas leaf blowers, and the transition to electric is an economic burden. However, electric lawn equipment is often comparable in quality and performance to gasoline-

⁵ Air Pollution. Chesapeake Bay. (n.d.). <https://www.chesapeakebay.net/issues/threats-to-the-bay/air-pollution>

⁶ 2022 State of the Blueprint. Chesapeake Bay Foundation. (n.d.). <https://www.cbf.org/how-we-save-the-bay/chesapeake-clean-water-blueprint/state-of-the-blueprint/>

⁷ Hufham, A. (2021, December 3). *Environmental Advisory Council talks leaf blowers*. Yale Daily News. <https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2021/12/03/environmental-advisory-council-talks-leaf-blowers/#:~:text=From%20an%20environmental%20standpoint%2C%20the.and%20potentially%20pollute%20water%20sources>

⁸ *Asthma in Baltimore*. Baltimore City Health Department. (2022, May 12). <https://health.baltimorecity.gov/node/454#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Maryland%20Department%20of%20Health%20and,compared%20to%208.4%25%20statewide%20and%208.6%20%25%20nationally>.

⁹ Cardoza, M. (2024, January 8). *Why cities are taking action to limit loud, polluting lawn care*. National Audubon Society. <https://www.audubon.org/magazine/spring-2021/why-cities-are-taking-action-limit-loud-and>

¹⁰ Hufham, A. (2021, December 3). *Environmental Advisory Council talks leaf blowers*. Yale Daily News. <https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2021/12/03/environmental-advisory-council-talks-leaf-blowers/#:~:text=From%20an%20environmental%20standpoint%2C%20the.and%20potentially%20pollute%20water%20sources>

¹¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, January 6). *Too loud! For too long!*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/hearingloss/index.html>

powered equipment.^{12,13} Although there is an upfront capital cost to transition to electric equipment, the cost can be mitigated if prohibitions are phased in over a few years or paired with financial support to offset the transition. Savings in gasoline costs can allow the transition to electric leaf blowers be paid back in one to three years, and improvements in battery technology provide a much lower cost of ownership over time.¹⁴ The cost of addressing the human and environmental health impacts caused by gas-powered equipment can be much higher than the cost to transition to electric.

Evidence that this transition is feasible can be found in the many jurisdictions who have already taken action. Chevy Chase Village¹⁵, Somerset¹⁶, Hyattsville¹⁷, Montgomery County¹⁸, and Annapolis¹⁹ have all passed ordinances to phase out gas-powered leaf blowers. Consistency across neighboring jurisdictions will provide greater regulatory certainty for companies who work across multiple counties and municipalities.

Conclusion

The American Lung Association's State of the Air report released this April reveals that Baltimore City's air quality grade improved from a "C" to a "B" during the years 2020-2022.²⁰ The prohibition of gas-powered blowers can add to the work that City officials have been doing to improve air quality. Additionally, this legislation would further efforts to improve residents' well-being and environmental health.

¹² Quiet Clean D.C. (2018, July 19). *July 2, 2018 Testimony of Zachary "Zack" Kline, Air Lawn Care*. Quiet Clean D.C. <https://www.quietcleandc.com/testimony/july2-kline>

¹³ Graham, T. (2024, June 7). *The best cordless leaf blowers, tested by a lawn expert*. Family Handyman. <https://www.familyhandyman.com/list/best-cordless-leaf-blower/>

¹⁴ Dutzik, T., Sokolow, L., Schatz, K., & Metzger, L. (2023, October 30). *Lawn Care Goes Electric*. Maryland Public Interest Research Group Foundation.

<https://pirg.org/maryland/foundation/resources/lawn-care-goes-electric/>

¹⁵ Leaf Blower Regulations—Ban on Gas-Powered Blowers Eff. January 1, 2022 (n.d.).

https://www.chevy Chase Villagemd.gov/DocumentCenter/View/4148/LeafBlower_cover0921FINALwHANDOUT

¹⁶ *Goodbye Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers, Here's Why Somerset Is Banning Them*. Maryland General Assembly. (n.d.).

https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/cmte_testimony/2022/ecm/1Zh8iUJWKP3vS2dr6AU_ve_v7_yC0lcqO.pdf

¹⁷ *Make the switch to electric leaf blowers!*. City of Hyattsville. (n.d.).

<https://www.hyattsville.org/1018/Make-the-Switch-to-Electric-Leaf-Blowers>

¹⁸ Bixby, G. (2023, September 27). *Montgomery County bans gas-powered leaf blowers*. MoCo360.

<https://moco360.media/2023/09/27/montgomery-county-bans-gas-powered-leaf-blowers/>

¹⁹ Loock, M. (2024, February 14). *Annapolis City Council passes bill banning gas powered leaf blowers; pauses new short-term rental licenses*. Capital Gazette.

<https://www.capitalgazette.com/2024/02/13/city-council-bans-gas-leaf-blowers-short-term-rental/>

²⁰ Collins, D. (2024, April 27). *Baltimore region receives mixed reviews in Air Quality Report*. WBAL.

<https://www.wbal.com/article/2024-state-of-the-air-report-maryland-rankings/60594168>

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation encourages Baltimore City Council to adopt this legislation.

We are at your service if you have further inquiries.

Sincerely,

Julieta Rodrigo
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Chesapeake Bay Foundation