

Dear County Commissioners,

The negative impact of gas-powered leaf blowers (GLBs) on our public health and the environment is alarming and of great concern. Their use is harmful to workers, our communities, our climate and the environment. This is an urgent problem that requires a prompt solution.

We support the work of Quiet Clean PDX which is a broad-based coalition of individuals and organizations that has advocated for the elimination of GLBs in the greater Portland area for the past several years. They have received formal support on this issue from 14 Portland Neighborhood Associations, and 22 other local and national organizations that share our concern about the dangers of gas powered leaf blowers. We are part of a growing national movement that includes numerous states and counties, and hundreds of municipalities that ban or otherwise regulate the use of GLBs.

We support Quiet Clean PDX in their request that you address this serious public health and environmental issue, and find ways to protect workers and the public from GLBs. Alternatives such as rakes, brooms and battery powered blowers are cheaper, effective and require less maintenance. The longer we wait, the more our workers, our community and our environment will suffer from the impact of these devices.

We urge you to direct all County departments to transition from gas-powered to electric and/or battery-operated leaf blowers as soon as possible. By passing a resolution similar to that of the City of Portland's in 2019, you will go a long way in protecting the health of our workers and our communities.

We also strongly urge the County to explore fair and equitable ways to eliminate the use of these dangerous and unnecessary machines throughout the county, as other places have done. Please consider establishing a joint work group with the City of Portland to develop solutions. The transition period should be as short as possible. A fair and equitable transition can be accomplished in well under a year.

This year, the Quiet Clean PDX organization has been asked to partner with Voz Worker Education Project. Voz will undertake this project, funded by the Portland Clean Energy Fund, in order to lay the groundwork for a meaningful, transformative green workforce development program that will increase job and economic opportunities for day laborers and domestic workers.

These tools are dangerous, polluting and unnecessary. They are extremely loud, which can cause permanent hearing damage, and are disruptive to our peaceful communities, including pets and wildlife. GLBs emit more pollutants than car engines due to their low level of emissions control. California estimates that small engines like those in gas leaf blowers are now the leading cause of air pollution in that state.

Emissions from gas blowers are known to increase risk of cancer, respiratory disease, cardiovascular disease and neurological disorders.

Toxic waste from these devices -- from frequent fuel spills, dirty air and fuel filters, and old spark plugs -- ends up polluting the ground as well as landfills.

And their powerful blasts (even more so than electric blowers) compact soils, disrupt ecosystems, and kick up debris that destroys pollinator habitats.

Please support all endeavors to eliminate GLBs from Multnomah County, including funding for procurement of battery powered lawn and garden maintenance equipment by county departments.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Stan Penkin
President, Pearl District Neighborhood Association
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