

**Comments Submitted to the House Committee on Energy and Environment
in support of
Quiet Clean PDX's Goal to Eliminate Gas-powered Leaf Blowers (HB 3023, 2021)**

Testimony 1

From: Paul Christensen <pchristensen.100@gmail.com>
Subject: Please BAN GAS LEAF BLOWERS! NOW!
Date: May 12, 2021 at 9:21:19 AM PDT
To: HEE.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov

Dear Commissioners:

We're concerned about the negative impacts of gas-powered leaf blowers on our community, including the workers who use these machines. We feel this is a serious public health and environmental issue, and one for which a viable alternative exist: electric (vs. gas) blowers are all readily available and effective options, and are cheaper, cleaner, and lower maintenance than gas-powered leaf blowers. We use one with great success - plenty of power, MUCH lower decibels, no gas fumes.

Our neighborhood now relies on landscapers that move from one house to the next, so the noise and fumes BUILD UP FOR HOURS, THEN THE NEXT DAY ANOTHER CREW ARRIVES to blow another set of houses. The deafening noise continues day after day now, making it extremely difficult to work at home.

We ask you to address the multiple harms caused by gas-powered leaf blowers, and protect our community and environment. We can see this is easy to accomplish from examples in banning these dangerous and unnecessary devices in Oakland CA and Washington D.C.

We urge the County to explore a fair way to eliminate the use of these devices throughout its jurisdiction, as other places have done. Please consider establishing a joint work group with the City of Portland to figure out how to make this happen as soon as possible.

We've researched this problem and gas powered blowers are dangerous and unnecessary:

- The extremely loud noise from gas leaf blowers can cause permanent hearing damage. This level of noise can create physiological stress that leads to adverse effects on human cardiovascular health, immune systems and cognitive development.
- They 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 the state.)

- Their powerful blasts compact soils, disrupt ecosystems, kick up harmful debris clouds, and destroy pollinator habitat.

These devices are often used by low-wage workers who cannot choose the tools they are asked to use, may not be aware of the risks of using them, and frequently aren't wearing adequate protection. You have an opportunity to improve the health of thousands of workers in the county.

Thank you for addressing this serious public health and environmental issue as soon as possible.

Sincerely,
Paul & Nan Christensen
Portland, OR 97212
Multnomah County District 2

Testimony 2

From: Robert Reincke <robertreincke@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 11, 2021 9:39 PM
To: HEE Exhibits <HEE.Exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov>
Subject: HB 3023

Dear Representatives,

I am a citizen of Portland Oregon and would hereby ask that you hear my testimony in favor of HB 3023.

I've worked out of my home since well before the pandemic (20 years now). While normal neighborhood noise is something that is easy to mitigate, I find it impossible to work around the harrowing intrusions that come from gas powered blowers. There is a difference and a great one. I won't go into great detail because I'm sure that you all understand (isn't it true that you do?). The point being that gas blower noise and debris pollution is very detrimental to those who work or study at home.

Secondly, I'm both a walker and a bike rider. There is no way to close your eyes when walking down a sidewalk or riding your bike, but close your eyes is what's necessary for them not to be inundated with dirt, dust and debris, especially if you pass by a gas blower blowing in the middle of a very dry spell (like our entire summer season, for example). I won't go into the obnoxiousness of breathing the fumes and dust while one is needing clean air to maintain their physical momentum. It's horrible and obnoxious and an intrusion in one's very ability to actually be mobile outside of a car!

Finally, from what I see in my neighborhood, they are completely unnecessary. As the neighborhood continues to rise in price and attract more people who can afford very expensive homes, it also attracts people who choose to hire services to maintain their (small) yards instead of doing so themselves. I've literally watched lawn service companies with very noisy gas blowers come and blow the grass dry in front of houses (during rainy times when the grass hasn't actually even grown) and/or blow dirt on multiple cars parked on the street for quite a long time seemingly just to justify time spent on a yard in which additional work does not need to be done. Needless to say, the lawn service providers do not respond positively if I ask them to please consider using a rake.

I won't go on as I'm sure you all have personal experiences with gas blowers that allows you to recount memories of the noise, smell and debris storms.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,
Robert Reincke
Portland OR 97215

Testimony 3

I am writing in support of passage of HB3023. I have felt very strongly for a long time that gas leaf blowers should not be allowed. Not only are they taking away from our ultimate goal of moving to a carbon neutral state and country, they are impacting the physical and emotional health of all of us today. I am a native born Oregonian and have watched the changes to our "gardening" over the last 60 years. I live in a neighborhood with very small lots and it takes me at most 10 minutes to push mow my front yard. However, as the neighborhood has gentrified, few of my neighbors still take care of their own lawns. Instead they hire landscaping companies who blast the lawn debris down the streets. The noise is truly horrendous and the quality of the air is certainly negatively impacting all of us. This needs to stop ASAP.

Thank you for taking the necessary steps to find more balance in our gardening practices.

Sincerely,

Dr. Barbara Ruben
Portland, Oregon 97212

Testimony 4

Dear Committee Members,

As I write this, I am listening to the loud drone of a gas-powered blower outside my window. It seems to be an endless noise in our neighborhood. I would like to share my personal experience of why gas-powered blowers should be banned in Oregon.

In Dec 2019, I slipped on the basement stairs of our house and broke my arm. Because my neighbor was using a loud gas-powered blower, my husband could not hear me calling for help until the blower was turned off. Our windows were closed because it was December, but the noise still blasted into our house. My other observation about gas-powered blowers is that they spew gasoline fumes, dust, pollen and whatever else happens to be on the ground, high into the air and into our lungs. One late afternoon, we could see through the setting sun that debris being stirred up by another neighbor's yard crew was swirling around at the height of our 2nd story windows. Thankfully, they were closed.

Please ban noisy, polluting gas-powered blowers. There are more ecological ways to move leaves and grass clippings off of sidewalks and driveways. Please save our lungs and the environment.

Thank you,
Jane Monson
Portland, OR 97202

Testimony 5

Re: HB 3023, Eliminate Two-Cycle Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers in Populous Counties

Dear Legislators:

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought respiratory issues to the forefront, so this is a good time to consider what leaf blowers actually blow. Not just leaves—although I’ve seen gardeners blow one leaf dozens of feet just to get it where they want it. The blowers also aerosolize all the other stuff that lands on lawn, other garden areas and paving, including bark dust, fertilizer, weed and moss killers, and birds’ and animals’ feces.

It’s not an appetizing concoction, and who has to breathe it? The gardeners, few of whom use sufficient masks, and anyone passing by. The worst are gas-powered blowers, run by horrendously air-polluting engines. Recent research links air pollution to brain damage:

<https://www.pnas.org/content/117/25/13856>

Those engines are also deafening. The sound they make is particularly penetrating. When sitting in my home office, I can hear the roar of my neighbors’ hired gardening crews’ blowers for far longer than it would take to remove the minimal amount of dust and leaves that usually appear in their yards. I can’t avoid the racket without leaving, and neither can other neighbors, or those living or working in buildings whose management uses or contracts for use of the blowers.

Back in the early 1980s, Portland’s Mayor Frank Ivancie (speaking, no doubt, for many others) supported then-legal backyard burning, saying it helped keep Portland yards looking neat. That smoke was too heavy a price to pay, so it’s no longer legal to burn debris in one’s yard.

In succeeding decades, the pursuit of yard perfection has fueled the invasion of gas-powered leaf blowers. They seem to be wielded mostly by hired hands who may not feel able to challenge injurious working conditions.

Many times a rake or broom works better than a blower. When it’s wet, blowers are pretty much useless. “Perfection” that lasts only until the next gust of wind, and for which people pay with their respiratory, brain and auditory health, is definitely the enemy of the better.

Some local governments (including Oakland, California, and Washington, DC) have banned the gas leaf blowers, and so should we. It’s time to enact a rapid phase out of these “devil’s hairdryers.”

Very truly yours,

Amy Houchen
Portland, OR 97239
House District 36

May 11, 2021

Testimony 6

Dear House Committee on Energy and Environment,

I am very concerned about the impact of gas-powered leaf blowers on our public health and the environment. Their use is harmful to workers, our communities, our climate and ecosystems and thus touches on several incredibly important issues: social justice, health care, environmental degradation, climate change. This is an urgent problem that requires a prompt solution.

I live in Eastmoreland, an upper-income neighborhood in SE Portland with well-informed and highly educated residents. Despite this, many residents hire landscape companies that use gas-powered leaf blowers. A stroll through our neighborhood on most any day of the week is usually never peaceful – my husband and I encounter deafening leaf blowers at least once or twice, and sometimes three times, on virtually every walk we take.

Gas leaf blowers 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. Gas leaf blowers emit many times 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.

I will be giving a presentation to the Eastmoreland Neighborhood Association this month to provide some much-needed information about the hazards of gas leaf blowers to my fellow neighbors.

Please address this serious public health and environmental issue and find ways to protect workers and the public from gas leaf blowers. 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.

Thank you for supporting efforts to achieve a fair and equitable transition away from gas leaf blowers in the Portland metro area.

Sincerely,
Sally Campbell
Eastmoreland Neighborhood
Portland, OR 97202

Testimony 7

May 14, 2021
The Honorable Pam March
House Energy and Environment Committee
900 Court St. NE, H-474
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: Support for House Bill 3023 — Relating to Leaf Blowers

Dear Chair Marsh and members of the committee:

I urge you to support HB 3023, which would ban the sale and use of two-cycle gasoline-powered leaf blowers in counties with a population greater than 400,000.

As noted in the legislative findings enumerated in Section 1 of the bill, these two-cycle engines are harmful to public and operator health and have noise levels that can cause hearing damage. Alternatives, including electric battery powered leaf blowers, are readily available and more cost-effective to operate over their life cycles.

As the former (now retired) Air Quality Division Administrator for DEQ, I am aware of the significant contribution of two-cycle gasoline-powered engines to air pollutants of particular concern in Oregon, including ozone (smog) precursors, particulate, carbon monoxide and greenhouse gases. Because of their inefficient combustion, these engines emit an outsized proportion of emissions from the gasoline-powered lawn and garden equipment category, which in turn accounts for a major portion of emissions from nonroad gasoline engines.

As a resident of Portland, I'm also acutely aware of the localized noise and air pollution from the use of gasoline-powered leaf blowers in my neighborhood. Beginning in early spring and continuing through late fall, we're subjected to frequent and extended noise and fumes from these engines that is disruptive and stressful.

I have a hearing impairment, and the noise from leaf blowers is loud enough for me to worry about further hearing damage when I have to pass them on the street. I'm glad when I see workers wearing hearing protection, but that also underscores just how loud this equipment is.

Some conscientious landscapers are already switching to electric and/or battery-operated equipment, which is quieter, less polluting, and more cost-effective to operate over the equipment's life cycle. Banning the sale and use of two-cycle gasoline-powered leaf blowers in counties with a population greater than 400,000 is a rare opportunity to reduce air and noise pollution, protect workers health and hearing, and save operators money at the same time.

Thank you for your consideration of this issue, and please support HB 3023.

Sincerely,

Andrew Ginsburg
Portland, Oregon 97201
