

Testimony on Expedited Bill 19-25 - Noise Control - Leaf Removal Equipment - Seasonal Exemption from Tiffin Shewmake, Rockville

Dear County Council:

There is no need to relitigate the ban on gas-powered leaf blowers, they were banned for good reasons. Companies were given time to adjust and provided with subsidies to help them transition to the electric leaf blowers. Weakening a bill before it is even implemented reduces the incentive for companies to comply with new regulations and creates the expectation that regulations can be reversed with a bit of lobbying. It also penalizes companies that have purchased new equipment to comply with the bill while rewarding companies that either didn't plan or don't intend to. In addition, it erodes the public's trust in the regulatory process and in elected officials.

I strongly urge the County Council to reject this effort and continue working on creating a better community in Montgomery County.

As a reminder, there is no good reason to continue allowing such damaging machines that harm human health and the environment. Gas-powered leaf blowers spew significant amounts of cancer-causing chemicals such as benzene and unburned fuel; pollutants that contribute to smog and ozone such as volatile organic compounds and nitrogen oxides and; and hazardous pollutants such as particulates and carbon monoxide. As if that is not bad enough, they also generate CO₂ emissions that contribute to climate change. The health effects of air pollution are well documented and include asthma, stroke, heart disease, dementia, low birth-weight babies, and more.

In addition, the extreme noise from gas-powered leaf blowers is damaging. Leaf blowers can be up to 112 decibels, louder than the sound of a plane taking off. The noisiest leaf blowers can damage hearing in as little as 2 hours. Studies have found that every 5-decibel increase in the average daily noise level around people's homes leads to a 34% increase in heart attacks and strokes. To make it worse, the low-frequency noise from leaf blowers carries over long distances and penetrates walls, meaning that residents can't escape the noise. In addition, there is no quiet time, as many lawn companies operate in the evenings and on weekends. This noise can also hurt workers. Exposure to excessive noise for many hours can result in permanent hearing loss. It should be noted, that the use of personal protective equipment to protect hearing is far from universal with landscaping companies and their employees.

While the current Administration has injected uncertainty into the economy, at the moment, inflation and gas prices are relatively low. This bill seems to be anticipating economic issues in the fall, but the reality is that no one knows what the economy will be

like in the future. What we do know is that companies have a long history of exaggerating the cost and impact of legislation designed to protect human health and the environment. For example, industry estimates of the cost of reducing CFCs in car air conditioners was up to \$1,200 per car – the actual cost topped out at \$400 per car. Auto manufacturers also fought requirements for seat belts, air bags, and catalytic converters, saying that they were too expensive. In addition, without regulations, companies that want to do the right thing must compete with companies that don't care about health or the environment. Health and safety regulations help companies that want to do better for their employees, the community, and the environment.

Excessive leaf blowing is more than just annoying; it is destructive to the environment and damages biodiversity. Do you like fireflies? They need fallen leaves to live. This is true for other insects such as luna moths and the American Bumblebee. Many of the insects that songbirds eat need fallen leaves, which also provide habitat for toads and frogs. The noise from leaf blowers also affects animals such as birds, squirrels, rabbits, and frogs. Perhaps it is time to change attitudes about leaves and take a proactive approach to protecting the environment.

This bill makes the finding that “battery-powered alternatives are not yet fully viable for the volume and intensity of fall operations.” This may have been true at one point but is no longer accurate. According to a 2023 [Consumer Reports](#) analysis of leaf blowers, “the best electric models earn a sweeping score of 5.2, identical to what we’ve found from the best gas models.” There is no need for “new technology” to catch up. What is needed is for companies to use new technology and retire harmful technology. This is how we move forward.

The reality is that leaf blowers are unhealthy for workers, the community, and the environment. Perhaps instead of looking backwards and keeping the status quo, we should be finding solutions. Perhaps instead of accepting the inevitability of harmful noise and pollution, we should be building a better place to live. I hope that the County Council rejects this misguided attempt to circumvent an intelligent and needed approach and will continue working to make Montgomery County the best place to live in the US.