

Climate Assessment

Office of Legislative Oversight

EXPEDITED BILL 19-25: NOISE CONTROL – LEAF REMOVAL EQUIPMENT – SEASONAL EXEMPTION

SUMMARY

The Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) anticipates Expedited Bill 19-25 will likely have a small, negative impact on the County's contribution to climate change as it would allow for gas-powered leaf blowers to be used by commercial landscapers during peak leaf season. However, this exemption would last three years so it would have a small impact on the County overall.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF EXPEDITED BILL 19-25

The County Council passed a Bill in September 2021 which (1) established a ban on the sale of gas-powered leaf blowers beginning on June 1, 2024 and (2) completely banned the use of gas-powered leaf blowers beginning on July 1, 2025.¹ The purpose of this legislation was to decrease noise pollution and reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with the use of gas-powered leaf blowers.²

Expedited Bill 19-25 would create a seasonal exemption for landscaping companies that either own or operate a business in the County. Specifically, the Bill would:

- Establish an exemption for professional landscaping companies between October 1 – December 31 with a limit on use between 8 AM – 8 PM for weekdays only; and
- Sunset this exemption three years after the Bill becomes law.³

Expedited Bill 19-25 was introduced by the County Council on June 17, 2025.

METHODOLOGIES, ASSUMPTIONS, AND UNCERTAINTIES

Methodology. OLO reviewed research on gas-powered leaf blowers related to emissions, noise pollution, and other environmental impacts.

Assumptions. The assessment assumes at least some landscaping businesses would continue to use gas-powered leaf blowers during the exemption period.

Uncertainties. OLO cannot determine how many landscaping businesses would continue to use gas-powered leaf blowers until the proposed exemption expires.

EMISSIONS AND NOISE POLLUTION ASSOCIATED WITH COMMERCIAL LEAF BLOWER USE

While leaf blowers may be used year round to blow away light snow, grass trimmings, and other debris, heavy leaf blower use is during the fall season, when leaves start to fall from trees.⁴ The exemption would allow commercial landscapers to use gas-powered leaf blowers during peak leaf season, between October 1 – December 31.

The California Air Resources Board (CARB) estimated using a commercial gas-powered leaf blower for one hour produces as many emissions as a car driving 1,100 miles, approximately 440,000 grams (.49 tons)⁵ of carbon dioxide.⁶ Gas-powered leaf blower emissions also include particulate matter which contributes to decreased local air quality and is a key component of smog.⁷

A report conducted by the U.S. Public Interest Research Groups (PIRG) which used data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's National Emissions Inventory found that in 2020, Montgomery County was ranked 23rd out of the 100 top counties in the U.S. for emissions from lawn and garden equipment.⁸ An estimated 172,840 tons of carbon dioxide were released from lawn and garden equipment usage in the County, which includes gas-powered leaf blowers.⁹

Commercial gas-powered leaf blowers also cause significant noise pollution. A Harvard study found gas-powered leaf blowers greatly exceeded the World Health Organization's (WHO) Daytime Sound Standards of 55 decibels (dB(A)). It found that at 100 feet away from a running leaf blower, noise levels averaged 82.8 dB(A) and at 50 feet away, noise levels averaged 85.5 dB(A).¹⁰ Prolonged exposure to this level of noise can lead to hearing loss. Long, sustained exposure to noise pollution can also affect human health and lead to heart problems, high blood pressure, stress, anxiety, and other health issues.¹¹

WHO ruled noise as the second largest environmental factor contributing to health problems in Europe (the largest environmental factor being air pollution).¹² The CDC also recognizes the dangers of noise pollution on human health and the recommended exposure limit for work-related noise exposure to be below 85 (dBA) over an eight-hour shift.¹³ Decreasing noise pollution can improve health outcomes, and subsequently increase community resilience.¹⁴

ANTICIPATED IMPACTS

Commercial, gas-powered leaf blowers cause air and noise pollution in communities. The Bill proposes an exemption from October 1 – December 31 to allow commercial landscape businesses to use gas-powered leaf blowers, which includes peak leaf season in the fall.

The Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) anticipates Expedited Bill 19-25 will likely have a small, negative impact on the County's contribution to climate change as it would allow for gas-powered leaf blowers to be used by commercial landscapers during peak leaf season. However, this exemption would last three years so it would have a small impact on the County overall. The specific impacts on the County's greenhouse gas emissions and community resilience are as follows:

Greenhouse Gas Emissions. Using a commercial gas-powered leaf blower for one hour produced as many emissions as a car driving 1,100 miles, approximately 440,000 grams of carbon dioxide (.49 tons). Assuming multiple landscaping businesses in the County will use gas-powered leaf blowers during the proposed exemption, this would contribute negatively to the County's greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals.

Community Resilience. Usage of commercial gas-powered leaf blowers can impact an individual's health by exposure to air and noise pollution. Usage of these leaf blowers can impact the health of both landscape workers and residents in a community where equipment is being used. Health outcomes of a community are tied to a community's resilience – improving health outcomes can increase community resilience and vice versa.

RECOMMENDED AMENDMENTS

The Climate Assessment Act requires OLO to offer recommendations, such as amendments or other measures to mitigate any anticipated negative climate impacts.¹⁵ OLO anticipates Expedited Bill 19-25 will likely have a small, negative impact on the County's contribution to addressing climate change.

To reduce the climate impact of this bill, OLO recommends that the Council could shorten the time of the professional landscaper exemption period and/or set an earlier sunset date. Any reduction in the usage of gas-powered leaf blowers would reduce the negative impact on the County's contribution to climate change.

CAVEATS

OLO notes two caveats to this climate assessment. First, predicting the impacts of legislation upon climate change is a challenging analytical endeavor due to data limitations, uncertainty, and the broad, global nature of climate change. Second, the analysis performed here is intended to inform the legislative process, not determine whether the Council should enact legislation. Thus, any conclusion made in this statement does not represent OLO's endorsement of, or objection to, the bill under consideration.

PURPOSE OF CLIMATE ASSESSMENTS

The purpose of the Climate Assessments is to evaluate the anticipated impact of legislation on the County's contribution to addressing climate change. These climate assessments will provide the Council with a more thorough understanding of the potential climate impacts and implications of proposed legislation, at the County level. The scope of the Climate Assessments is limited to the County's contribution to addressing climate change, specifically upon the County's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and how actions suggested by legislation could help improve the County's adaptive capacity to climate change, and therefore, increase community resilience.

While co-benefits such as health and cost savings may be discussed, the focus is on how proposed County bills may impact GHG emissions and community resilience.

CONTRIBUTIONS

OLO staffer Kaitlyn Simmons drafted this assessment.

¹ ["Leaf Blowers", Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection, Accessed July 8, 2025.](#)

² ["Introduction Staff Report for Expedited Bill 19-25, Noise Control - Leaf Removal Equipment - Seasonal Exemption", Montgomery County Council, Introduced June 17, 2025.](#)

³ [Ibid.](#)

⁴ ["Leaf Blowers Today", Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, Accessed 7/7/2025.; "The Debate Over Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers Gusts into Federal Court", Georgetown Environmental Law Review, April 3, 2025.](#)

⁵ Calculated from ["Greenhouse Gas Emissions from a Typical Passenger Vehicle", US EPA](#)

⁶ ["SORE - Small Off-Road Engines Fact Sheet", California Air Resources Board, Accessed 7/7/2025.](#)

⁷ ["Greenhouse Gas Emissions from a Typical Passenger Vehicle", US EPA, Accessed 7/7/2025.; "Particulate Matter \(PM\) Basics", U.S. EPA, Accessed 7/7/2025.](#)

⁸ Lawn and garden equipment includes lawn mowers, leaf blowers, string trimmers, chainsaws, and other gas-powered lawn and garden equipment.

⁹ ["Lawn Care Goes Electric:", U.S. Public Interest Research Groups, October 2023.](#)

¹⁰ ["Characteristics of Lawn and Garden Equipment Sound: A Community Pilot Study", Walker, E. and Banks, J. L., Journal of Environmental Toxicology Studies, August 23, 2019.](#)

¹¹ ["Too Loud! For Too Long!", Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Accessed 7/8/2025.](#)

¹² ["Noise". World Health Organization, Accessed 7/8/2025.; "Could everyday noise be affecting your health?", UC Davis Environmental Health Sciences Center, March 3, 2023.](#)

¹³ ["Understand Noise Exposure: Noise and Hearing Loss", Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, February 16, 2024.](#)

¹⁴ ["What are the lessons from COVID-19 for creating healthy, sustainable, resilient future cities?", Giles-Corti, et. al., Nature - NPJ Urban Sustainability, June 2, 2023.; "Perceptions Of Community Resilience: A Maryland Community Pilot Study", Akerlof, K., et. al.,](#)

[Natioanl Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2016.; "Environmental Noise Pollution in the United States: Developing an Effective Public Health Response", Hammer, M. S., Swinburn, T. K., and Neitzel, R. L., Environmental Health Perspectives, December 5, 2013.](#)

¹⁵ Bill 3-22, Legislative Branch – Climate Assessments – Required, Montgomery County Council, Effective date October 24, 2022