

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** [Andrea Chow](#)  
**Subject:** Re: Leaf Blower Survey Reminder  
**Date:** Tuesday, February 21, 2023 11:03:40 PM  
**Attachments:** [image013.png](#)  
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[image018.png](#)

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ANDREA. sorry for reply late.

i received your letter regarding your request for feedback on the new policy concerning electric leaf blowers. i think this is NOT a good idea for gardeners or their customers for the following reasons:

- . Electric blowers are three times the cost of a gas blower which will add expense back to the customers.
- . Batteries for leaf blowers only last approximately 30 minutes Wich would require a Gardner to carry additional batteries and chargers again adding additional expense.
- . Gardners who have tried electric blowers say there is a very short life span for this equipment and poor quality.
- . Electric blowers do not have the same power as a gas blower, therefore. requiring more manual labor and more customer expense in order to do the job correctly.
- . Designated days for gas blowers only make the problem worse and require more scheduling which could amount to less business for the gardeners and additional expense for customers

Hopefully, this will help your survey and the people it serves.

Sincerely,

Jose I hernandez.

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**De:** Andrea Chow <[achow@cityofsanmateo.org](mailto:achow@cityofsanmateo.org)>  
**Enviado:** viernes, 3 de febrero de 2023 01:22 p. m.  
**Asunto:** Leaf Blower Survey Reminder

Hello,

The City of San Mateo is considering new rules that could affect your business and would like to learn more about the use of gas and electric leaf blowers by landscaping businesses. Your feedback will be shared with the San Mateo City Council as they consider leaf blower policy options at an upcoming City Council Meeting (tentatively scheduled for Monday, March 20 at 5:30 pm). A start date for potential regulations has not been determined and businesses will be given time to transition and prepare for new rules. Your feedback is very important and urgently wanted about leaf blower use. Please share your feedback by February 17, 2023.

Regulations being considered include:

- Only allowing leaf blower use during certain days/times of the week
- Prohibiting gas leaf blowers and only allowing electric leaf blowers
- Complete gas and electric leaf blower ban

The online survey is available at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/leafblowersm>. Feel free to call or email me with your feedback.

Sincerely,

Andrea



**Andrea Chow**

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January 28, 2022

Andrea Chow  
City of San Mateo  
330 West 20th Avenue  
San Mateo, CA 94403

Silver Fox Landscaping  


Hi Andrea,

Thank you for the opportunity to give feedback on commercial leaf blower use.

This is the issue we're debating: Should we allow heavily polluting, very dangerous, fossil fuel burning tools for tidying up our lawns?

With climate change's rapidly worsening storms, heat waves, and drought, the answer should be obvious. Yet, here we are with more hand-wringing over imaginary "economic" effects. We're fiddling while the planet burns.

I founded Silver Fox Landscaping to offer an electric-only landscaping service, which minimizes leaf blower use. The community needs it.

I'm sure commercial landscapers will overwhelmingly tell you they *must* use gas yard tools. In fact, the business case isn't there. I wrote a legislation proposal to Senator Josh Becker (enclosed). I haven't seen the business case explained alongside gas tools' health and safety hazards, so the legislation proposal does that.

I've also included a Daily Journal article I very quickly annotated. My handwriting isn't going to win any penmanship awards, so I hope it's clear enough.

Thank you for your time,

Dustin Chase  
Silver Fox Landscaping

# California State Legislation Proposal

Dustin Chase



## Problem

Gas yard tools pollute the air, damage the land, destroy wildlife habitat and endanger their users.

## Legislation

The legislation would be called "The Smart Landscaping Act."

The City of San Francisco recently passed the "Healthier, Cleaner, Quieter Communities Act" ( Ordinance No. 202-22, File No. 220199), which bans gas yard tools. It is excellent legislation. This proposal adds 2 provisions: citizen affidavits to to make the ban's enforcement easier and recommendations for public education.

The California state government could use the San Francisco example. Generally, the legislation would do the following:

Prohibit gas yard tool use in California.

1. 2 year phase-in period for public government operators
2. 4 year phase-in for private operators

Small Business Support Program

1. Gas yard tool exchange program
2. Gas yard tool disposal program
3. Electric yard tool transition support
  1. Education program for both business and citizen audiences
  2. Electric and hand tool demonstrations
  3. Electric and hand transition tool training

## Problem Details

Our communities have been forced to accept gas yard tools' ear splitting noise, carcinogenic fumes and environmental destruction for decades. Everyone, especially landscapers, would benefit from a gas yard tool ban.

Paradoxically, the ones most harmed by gas yard tools have fought the hardest to keep them. Generally, landscapers don't know gas yard tools' health risks. More importantly, they believe their livelihood depends on them. So, this proposal will address the business case for electric yard tools.

Many cities have banned gas yard tools, specifically leaf blowers. However, the bans are not enforced.<sup>1</sup> This proposal will address enforcement barriers.

### Current Law is Inadequate

Recent California legislation, *AB 1346 Air pollution: small off-road engines*, only mildly impacts gas yard tools. It only bans the *sale* of gas yard tools in California. Any gas yard tools in use today and purchased in at *least* the next two years will remain legal to use. The landscaping industry is lobbying to push the effective date back.<sup>2</sup>

Further, the law is easily circumvented and many in the industry do not intend to comply.<sup>3</sup>

### The Business Case

*Using gas yard tools is simply bad business.* Gas yard tools are destructive, hazardous and expensive.

Oddly, the NALP also contradicts itself. While vehemently protesting an electric tool shift, its own magazine features a large Bay Area company that has successfully made the change.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Opinion: An Earth Day goal: Let's end the use of gas-powered leaf blowers - [berkeleyside.org](http://berkeleyside.org)

<sup>2</sup> National Association of Landscape Professionals - Battery-Power Transition/CARB Regulation Messaging

<sup>3</sup> California's landscapers bear brunt of ban on gas-powered mowers - The Guardian

<sup>4</sup>The Edge, January/February 2022 page 27

## Destruction

Consistently, landscapers have blocked gas yard tool bans because they believe their businesses depend on them. However, gardening businesses do not depend on the *tools*. They depend on the *land*. Without gas yard tools, the business can adapt and carry on. But if the land is destroyed, so is the business.

Yet, landscaping practice tends to be destructive. Leaf blowers are the worst offenders. They strip top soil and destroy vital insect and other wildlife habitat: wildlife necessary to support their customers' lawns.<sup>5</sup>

Leaf blowers also send debris and particulate matter, like old animal feces, into the air.

## Expensive

The landscaping industry claims electric tools are too expensive. However, it costs *more* to use gas yard tools than it does to use electric yard tools. Gas yard tools operating costs are high: they need careful tuning, specialized oil, and, of course, gasoline. Electric yard tools require little more than battery charging.

The latest electric tools are as powerful as their equivalent gas tools. They also do not require any special charging infrastructure. They charge on standard household electric (120 Volt) in as little as 30 minutes.<sup>6</sup>

Let's look at electric tools' upfront costs. Gas and electric tools cost about the same. For an example, a gas leaf blower costs about the same as its electric equivalent (with large capacity battery and charger).<sup>7</sup> Andrew Bray, vice president of government relations for the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) claims a commercial electric commercial mower costs double its gas equivalent.<sup>8</sup> However, an electric commercial mower can cost *less* than its gas cousin.<sup>9</sup>

Batteries, however, cost anywhere from \$100 to \$400, depending on their capacity. Landscapers claim they would need dozens of batteries to get through a single work day. However, that is based on a false assumptions about battery life and how yard tools are actually used.

The leaf blower is the most energy-hungry, and the first to doubt cast on electric yard tools. On a typical job, a landscaper runs the blower in short bursts, ranging from low to high power. The

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<sup>5</sup>Soils Alive: How Leaf Blowers Destroy Your Top Soil

<sup>6</sup> EGO Power+ Charger Operator's Manual page 12

<sup>7</sup> Echo ECHO PB-580T at Home Depot & Ego Power+ LB6003 at Leaf Blowers Direct

<sup>8</sup> California moves toward ban on gas lawn mowers and leaf blowers - LA Times October 9, 2021

<sup>9</sup> EGO Power+ Z6 ZT5207L 52 in. Electric 56 V Battery Zero Turn Riding Mower Kit (Battery & Charger) at Ace Hardware retrieved December 9, 2022, Z740R ZTrak™ Zero Turn Mower at John Deere retrieved December 9, 2022



gas tool idles much of the time, and is turned off and on as needed. An electric blower lasts about 3 hours on low power, which is sufficient to blow around dry leaves. Short bursts of high power can be used as needed. Sure, the blower's battery will drain in about 30 minutes on high speed, so the landscaper must be thoughtful and use only the energy the job requires. It's impossible to say how many batteries a particular business would need, but it's hard to believe the industry's wild claims about them.

Leaf blowers sometimes cause more problems than they solve. After all, they are called leaf *blowers*, not leaf *cleaners*. Gardeners are often fighting their own tools but don't realize it. I have observed landscapers at work in my city for over a year, and I saw many examples:

- They blow leaves and dirt too far, so blow them back. Back and forth they go, eventually moving the leaves into a pile.
- They go over Area 1 several times, blowing leaves around and gradually piling them up. While cleaning Area 2, they blow leaves back into Area 1. They clean Area 1 again.
- They blow leaves around an entire large area, when they could have simply swept up the piles the wind had blown together.

Worst, one crew will blow leaves into a neighbor's yard, then a different crew blows them back the next day. The awful noise, clouds of dust and noxious air pollution is all for nothing.

I make this argument from personal experience. I bought a suite of electric yard tools at my own expense and tested them around my building. My electric blower took *longer* than simply using a push broom and rake.

Obviously, there are use cases for leaf blowers. But today, they are the hammer that makes everything look like a nail.

To be fair, electric tools' upfront costs can be hefty. However, any business is expected to look after its costs, and invests wisely to reduce them. In addition, this legislation would subsidize those business investments. It is challenging to adapt to electric tools, but the investment pays off handsomely.<sup>10</sup>

## **Business Case Summary**

*The fact is, our communities must adapt to the global warming crisis. Gas yard tools are no longer acceptable, and the industry must change.*

There's nothing onerous about a gas yard tool ban. Any business should be interested in both the greater safety and the greater profits electric tools provide. The incentive to switch to electric tools is built-in!

As they adapt to electric yard tools, gardeners can alter their practices to better support both the land, their livelihoods, and their health. Many businesses have already made the wise

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<sup>10</sup> [landscapemanagement.net](http://landscapemanagement.net) Battery boon: breaking down the benefits of battery-powered equipment

choice.<sup>11 12</sup> In fact, the NALP contradicts itself on this point. While vehemently protesting an electric tool shift, its own magazine features a large Bay Area company that has successfully made the change.<sup>13</sup>

## Cities

Some city governments may object to a gas yard tool ban because their own efforts have failed. My city, San Mateo, had an electric tool rebate program in 2021 - 2022. Only a handful of landscapers took advantage of the program. The San Mateo Mayor claims this as proof landscapers aren't interested in electric tools. However, there was no serious follow-through after the program began. The city mailed a program application to the 130 businesses registered in San Mateo when the program began, and another toward the end of the program. That's not nearly enough effort to raise awareness. In addition, there was no Spanish language promotional materials. Later, this proposal describes a better marketing program.

City governments have an excellent example to follow: Southampton, New York. They phased out gas yard tools years ago, and they love the results.<sup>14</sup> California cities can learn from their leadership.

## Community Health

Gas yard tools are heavy contributors to global warming and their emissions contain carcinogens.<sup>15 16</sup> Engine emissions also damage children's lungs.<sup>17</sup> There are more community health threats. Leaf blowers are the most noxious example.

For decades, landscapers have claimed that leaf blowers save time. That's only true if we consider everyone else's time to be worthless.

Leaf blowers' are very loud, and their low-frequency noise easily passes through windows. For example, gas leaf blower noise travels up to 800 feet. The noise impairs cognitive performance in children and adults and "[t]he loudness of [gas powered leaf blowers'] sound at point of operation is especially concerning for the auditory and non- auditory health of workers and others regularly exposed in close proximity."<sup>18</sup> Even workers who use ear protection have suffered permanent hearing loss. One gardener lost 65% of his high frequency hearing.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Washington DC Public Testimony, Sainburg

<sup>12</sup>The Edge, January/February 2022 page 27

<sup>13</sup>The Edge, January/February 2022 page 27

<sup>14</sup> <https://youtu.be/H53JSXPXpI>

<sup>15</sup> CARB Fact Sheet - Small Off Road Engine Fact Sheet

<sup>16</sup> How bad for the environment are gas-powered leaf blowers? - Washington Post September 16, 2013

<sup>17</sup> The Washington Post and the Leaf Blower Show Down - The Atlantic January 18, 2016

<sup>18</sup> Journal of Environmental and Toxicology Studies: Characteristics of Lawn and Garden Equipment Sound: A Community Pilot Study

<sup>19</sup> Washington DC Public Testimony, Fallows



In addition, the noise impairs child development.<sup>20</sup>

Opponents of electric yard tools point out the “longer tailpipe.” True, electric tools don’t eliminate emissions altogether: their electricity is often produced with fossil fuels. However, burning fossil fuels in a power plant is much more efficient than burning them in an engine.

Battery material mining has environmental costs, and end of life battery disposal does, too. Still, switching away from gas power is a net gain in the global warming fight.<sup>21</sup>

In any case, the drawbacks of electric yard tools make a better argument for hand tools than they do for sticking with gas tools.

## **Global Warming Equity**

Gas yard tool operators are largely Latinx, so that group is hurt the most. They are exposed to the gas yard tools deafening noise and carcinogenic exhaust throughout their work days. California state government has pledged to address inequities in global warming affects, so this legislation aligns with the state government’s goals.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, frustrated people resent the invasive blower noise and come to resent landscapers themselves. This fractures our communities.<sup>23</sup>

## **Barriers**

### **Enforcement**

Many cities have managed to pass gas powered yard tools, but the ordinances are not enforced. City departments do not have enforcement resources, and it’s difficult to respond to a complaint quickly enough. By the time the enforcement officer gets there, the landscaper using the gas tools is long gone. Finally, the penalties are seen as an unfair burden on small businesses.

Citizen affidavits eases enforcement. Citizens may document the illegal activity themselves, including date, time and location. These are to be turned over to the responsible department, which first warns the property owner. The property owner would then be fined for additional violations.

Of course, the business could also be penalized. The key concept, however, is the property owner typically has the deepest pockets, so few could complain about unfairness.

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<sup>20</sup> frontiers in Psychology: Does noise affect learning? A short review on noise effects on cognitive performance in children

<sup>21</sup> How much CO2 is emitted by manufacturing batteries? - As MIT Climate July 15, 2022

<sup>22</sup> City and County of San Francisco Press Release: Supervisor Myrna Melgar Introduces the Healthier, Cleaner, Quieter, Communities Act

<sup>23</sup> Things I Never Told You About Being a Latino Gardener - Medium Jul 14, 2018

FEATURED

From the Daily Journal archives

## San Mateo examining ban on gas leaf blowers

New rules being discussed to help address environmental concerns

Curtis Driscoll Daily Journal staff

Nov 15, 2022



[f](#) [t](#) [e](#) [p](#) [i](#) [in](#)

Momentum is building for a gas ban on leaf blowers in San Mateo and a phased switch to an electric option, with the city exploring possibilities at a recent Sustainability and Infrastructure meeting.

The city is discussing a ban to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air and noise impact for residents, along with more restrictions on when to allow usage.

“These darn things truly pollute,” Sustainability and Infrastructure Chair Cliff Robbins said. “I’m not sure why we have somehow treated them differently than all the natural gas appliances that we regulate the heck out of for new development because these are



worse."

In 2020, the commission decided against making any regulation recommendation over concerns about how the added costs and hassle would affect the landscaper industry. However, it took the issue back up at its Nov. 9 meeting, with a commission majority recommending a phased gas ban in the coming years and further restrictions on use based on city zoning to the council.

Leaf blower use is only allowed from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays and from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays. Several commissioners suggested following Burlingame's example of having a zoned approach. Under the model, certain neighborhoods would use commercial blowers on specific days, with a map created to show the different zones and schedules.

The state is also playing a role after it banned new gas leaf blowers and lawnmowers through Assembly Bill 1346 in 2021, which prohibited the sale of new small off-road engines in 2024.

The city also receives noise complaints about leaf blowers, with about 15 leaf blower complaints per year, according to city staff. However, it does not typically issue citations because most people comply with changes, according to staff. Several public speakers asked for more restrictions to reduce gas fumes in dense neighborhoods and noise.

While the city is transitioning to electric equipment to align with state environmental goals, it also comes with challenges in performance and cost. A city staff report noted battery limitations in leaf blowers means it only gets 45 minutes of use but needs two hours to charge, making use difficult at large parks. Electric equipment is also less powerful and requires more time for the same amount of work. Costs also remain challenging as an electric backpack blower costs \$300 plus four batteries that cost \$300 each, totaling \$1,500 for each replacement. The city said it would cost an initial investment of \$18,000 to replace the city gas blower equipment and \$14,000 every two years for battery replacements. A gas-powered option typically costs \$375 plus fuel. The city has an electric leaf blower rebate program it started in 2021 that provides rebates for purchases with some takers. It issued eight commercial landscaper rebates and 30 residential rebates since it stated, a city staff report said. The average rebate amount for the commercial was \$311, while the residential was \$75.

Robbins suggested a gas ban with some transition time and a rebate program to help mitigate hardship for landscapers and a zoned concept. Robbins said the issue was about adjusting, similar to homeowners remodel adjustment to the electric appliance restrictions through the city's new reach codes.

I think homeowners and landscapers are just going to have to suck it up and adjust," Robbins said. "I don't think it's that difficult."

While the commission called for a ban, it did believe the city must do more outreach to landscapers and the public. Commission Kimiko Narita favored a gas ban and more research about the public health effect of gas leaf blowers. She called for comprehensive outreach to contractors and the Latino community disproportionately affected by the changes. She noted a gas ban would affect businesses every year and could potentially reduce income, as opposed to a one-time appliance change through reach codes.

"We need to be respectful and really thorough in that stakeholder engagement, or else we fail," Narita said.

continue to poison  
the air, deafen  
sicken users  
and severely  
harm quality  
of life

most believe this  
is a complete  
ban on gas blowers.  
it is not.

false!

this is just  
guessing

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for hazard

landscapers  
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way for decades.  
this is a  
ridiculous  
statement!

correct!

Over 20 cities in California have adopted gas leaf blower bans, including Portola Valley in 2019 and Oakland in 2020.

“Having those as really helpful case studies will provide a lot more assurance to a new council that this issue has been thoroughly researched for the third time,” Narita said.

Vice Chair Susan Rowinski said she was not comfortable with a gas ban currently. She cited the economic hardships and tight margins many landscapers face in trying to run a business but favored zoning changes to fight noise issues.

“We’ve heard from a lot of people tonight, but we didn’t hear from landscapers, and that’s key,” Rowinski said.

The City Council will have a study session on the issue in February or March 2023.

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**Curtis Driscoll Daily Journal staff**

Reporter

Curtis Driscoll covers transportation and the cities of San Mateo, Foster City, Belmont and Half Moon Bay. See my other articles: <https://bit.ly/3lruW6p>

A third time?  
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