

The Honorable Bruce R. Williams
Mayor, City of Takoma Park
7500 Maple Avenue
Takoma Park, MD 20912

October 13, 2008

Dear Mayor Williams:

We write to request that you schedule a City Council worksession as soon as practicable as a first step in city action to phase out the use of gasoline-powered leaf blowers in Takoma Park. These devices rely on remarkably inefficient, two-cycle gas-oil engines. Their loud whine can be heard for blocks. But as annoying as their noise is, it is the machines' contribution to air pollution that leads us to conclude the city should ban them.

Montgomery County Executive Ike Leggett has recommended that residents stop using gasoline-powered lawn care equipment, one of the top contributors of ozone-causing pollutants. The county has described the harmful effects. Here is an excerpt from one county pamphlet:

"Emissions from lawn and garden equipment like lawnmowers, chain saws, leaf blowers, string trimmers and other gasoline-powered outdoor equipment are a significant source of pollution. The small engines that power today's lawn and garden equipment are not controlled or maintained in the same way that engines on cars are, so they emit high levels of carbon monoxide (CO), volatile organic compounds (VOCs) as well as nitrogen oxides (NOx) and particulate matter (PM). These pollutants have negative health effects, and VOCs and NOx are the primary contributors to the formation of ground-level ozone, a key component of smog. Ground-level ozone is a particular problem in this region."

Numerous studies have documented the negative impact of the emissions on all types of vegetation, including trees, and on the wildlife that use the plants for food, shelter and breeding. Conversely, no studies or data demonstrate that leaf blowers are more efficient than rakes or brooms in gathering leaves.

We cannot delay addressing the problem of airborne emissions. Two recently promulgated federal regulations will require 1) that the D.C. metropolitan area significantly reduce harmful ozone levels, and 2) that manufacturers reduce emissions from small engines such as leaf blowers.

The first rule -- certainly the most nettlesome -- will force regional jurisdictions to search high and low for ways to cut VOC and nitrogen oxide emissions. The second offers a perfect opportunity to get people to switch to alternative methods of lawn care.

Takoma Park must ban gasoline-powered leaf blowers, whose costs -- to public health, the environment, and our quality of life -- far exceed real or perceived benefits. It is up to you and the City Council to act, hence our request that you schedule a worksession that will be a next step in formulating the right, environmentally friendly stance. We are at the Council's disposal to assist in that effort.

Sincerely,

Steve Davies, 6717 Poplar Avenue

Seth Grimes, 7300 Willow Avenue

Takoma Park environmental professionals/activists: Franca Brilliant, Paul Chrostowski, Jim Epstein, Melanie Fosnaught, Phil Friend, Susan Harris, Pat Howell, Bill Hutchins, Sat Jiwan Ikle-Khalsa, Marty Ittner, Joseph Klockner, Peter Lane, Diane MacEachern, Peter Marra, Alden Meyer, Brenda Platt, Scott Schang, Bruce Sidwell, Greg Smith, Eileen Sobeck, Mike Tabor, Betsy Taylor, Mike Tidwell, Dave Tilford, Monique Tilford, Chris Victoria