

City Council: 3 Minutes on Gas Leaf Blowers

Michael Shapiro, wife and I lived in Petaluma for 14 years.

Nearly paradise with one big exception: leaf blowers.

Case for banning leafblowers:

**Noise:** Levels can exceed 100 decibels, as loud as jackhammers yet they do something that's rarely essential.

**Noise effects:** headaches: Fumes can trigger asthmatic reactions such as wheezing and gasping for breath

Blind people: Rely on audio clues, leaf blower noise makes it harder for them to get around

Health: hearing damage and high cancer risk for workers, many of whom are immigrants with few other employment options.

CARB: exposure study found these workers could "potentially **double their current cancer risk** from carcinogens emitted by gas equipment."

Climate crisis: unconscionable that we allow these horribly polluting machines.

**James Fallows** in the Atlantic, a leaf blower's two-stroke engine "sloshes together a mixture of gasoline and oil in the combustion chamber and then spews out as much as one-third of that fuel as an unburned aerosol."

Since gas leaf blowers banned in Washington DC, Fallows said change has been dramatic: "**You can hear the silence.**"

"The soul experiences mechanical sounds as an assault," said retired psychotherapist **Larry Robinson**, former mayor of Sebastopol. The noise from gas leaf blowers is "especially painful because it is of a frequency that is almost impossible for the human brain to ignore," said Robinson "It overwhelms all other sounds, including music, conversation, the wind through the trees or the songs of birds. Absent these, our human lives are diminished."

**More remote work:** When we stay home to work on Zoom, the noise from neighboring leaf blowers can make communication difficult

Given the global emergency, leaf blowers and other small off-road engines (aptly called SORES) are "**low-hanging fruit** in our collective efforts to dramatically cut climate pollution," says Ellie Cohen of the Santa Rosa-base Climate Center.

So what can we do: **More than 100 US cities have banned gas leaf blowers**, including Palo Alto. We could follow these cities' lead and ban gas blowers.

Like ~~so~~ banning smoking in public places  
40 yrs of smoking ubiquitous - now illegal at work, in parks,  
on planes, etc.

Lucy Kortum, Bill K.

Freelance

Journalist who ~~also~~ writes

for Press Democrat + Napa

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Wash DC has combo of carrot and stick: buybacks of up to \$75 and fines for repeat violators.

I realize this is a first-world issue but we live in the first world and we can move toward a win-win for the climate and our mental health.

*We can make Petaluma  
an even better place to live.*

I'd be eager to work with the city Climate Action Commission to help make Petaluma free of these horrifically polluting machines at the earliest possible date.

Thanks for your consideration.

Michael Shapiro  
Resident of Upham Street, Petaluma

## LINKS

Press Democrat Opinion column on banning gas leaf blowers:

<https://www.pressdemocrat.com/article/opinion/close-to-home-time-to-ban-horribly-polluting-gas-leaf-blowers/>

Shapiro's story in Sierra magazine on banning gas leaf blowers:

<https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/2022-3-fall/notes-here-there/got-leafblower-blues-youre-not-only-one>

New York Times: "Let's Kill All the Leaf Blowers" by Margaret Renkl

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/25/opinion/leaf-blowers-california-emissions.html>

The Atlantic: "Get Off My Lawn" by James Fallows

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/04/james-fallows-leaf-blower-ban/583210/>