



Petition to Richmond:
Allow jurisdictions to phase out gas leaf blowers

Dear members of the Board of Supervisors,

August 10, 2021

Friends of Accotink Creek fully endorses Quiet Clean NOVA's petition to phase out the use of gas leaf blowers in Virginia. We urge the BOS to:

- 1) Petition Richmond to grant all jurisdictions in Virginia the authority to phase out gas blowers;
- 2) End the use of gas blowers on all County property;
- 3) Revise the noise ordinances to restrict the hours loud noise is imposed upon entire neighborhoods causing distress to both humans and wildlife;
- 4) Start an education outreach about the negatives of leaf blowers and the benefits of raking leaves and then keeping them in our yards - whether whole on the ground, in compost bins, or fine-mulched into the grass.

Friends of Accotink Creek supports a gas blower phase-out because of noise pollution (affecting both humans and wildlife), water pollution, habitat destruction, and climate change.

Noise: Along parts of the Accotink Trail, leaf blowers from adjoining private properties are all too audible. Many commercial gas blowers produce 90 to 110 dB at source. Gas blowers are typically louder than battery blowers. However, even when gas and battery blowers operate at the same decibel level, the gas-blowers are perceived as noisier and more disturbing because they generate more low-frequency sound.

https://quietcommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2018.07.16_DC-COW-Bill-22-234-Banks-Report_Final.pdf

We walk on the Trail to hear the calls of birds, frogs, insects, and foxes, and the sound of flowing water. Not loud machinery! Such noise intrudes upon our connection with the natural world and lowers the quality of life in an already noisy world. It is particularly galling to hear leaf blower noise in the summer when there are no leaves to blow. Studies show that birds are also impacted by loud noise. When thus exposed, birds either leave the area or stop foraging until the noise is over. (See Jesse Barber's research.) Bird communication is also compromised. (See research of David Luther, George Mason University.)

Water pollution:

We all know that gas blowers, lacking catalytic converters, pollute the air.

<https://www.edmunds.com/car-reviews/features/emissions-test-car-vs-truck-vs-leaf-blower.html>

Few know that they also pollute water.

By driving leaves to the curb for fall leaf collection, all blowers contribute to water pollution. However, being more efficient than battery blowers or rakes, gas blowers direct greater quantities of leaves and twigs into our streets. The more yard debris left on the street, the more leaves and leaf runoff enter drains and increase the BOD of our waterways. If leaves are to be brought to the curbside, raking is the most low-impact, nature-friendly way to move them. Rakers tend to stop before all leaves reach the curb, and will usually let lie the leaves under bushes or around the

edges of the yard. Therefore, more organic matter remains on the property and out of streams. Leaf litter and woody debris lying on the soil surface act like sponges, slowing down storm water, keeping sediment out of streams.

Properties divested of leaf litter play a further role in water pollution. Leaves finely mulched into the grass, and grass clippings left on the lawn nourish the lawn and shrubs. When this organic matter is removed, lawns need synthetic fertilizer. Runoff contaminated by fertilizer eventually reaches our waterways. Nitrogen and phosphorus from fertilizers result in excessive growth of water plants, and can cause algal blooms.

And that's not the end of the water pollution. All gas powered (and diesel) yard equipment need frequent refilling, and, in the process, fuel often gets spilled on the ground where it makes its way into streams. Also consider that the dirty oil-gas mix from gas blowers does not typically get properly disposed it - much of it gets just emptied onto the ground. (Spilled fuel evaporates releasing VOCs, a component of smog-forming ozone.)

Habitat destruction:

All leaf-blowers contribute to our falling populations of insects and birds. Driving leaves and other organic debris off properties deprives insects (including firefly larvae, ground nesting bees, and overwintering butterflies), spiders, and small invertebrates of habitat. Gas blowers, because of their very efficiency, will scalp yards more thoroughly than battery blowers. Leaf-blown properties leave few pupation sites for lepidoptera and little material for birds to forage or use for nest-building. Leaves play a vital role the ecosystem, they are not trash, and, ideally, should be kept in our yards.

Climate change:

Gas blowers, like most yard-maintenance equipment, run on fossil fuels and therefore add to rising CO2 levels in our atmosphere. Jamie Banks reports that in 2011 gas lawn and garden equipment emitted 20.4 millions tons of CO2 <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-09/documents/banks.pdf> Fossil fuel combustion also releases small quantities of nitrous oxide (laughing gas) the third most important greenhouse gas after carbon dioxide and methane. Synthetic fertilizers also emit nitrous oxide.

Both gas and battery blowers are bad news for our ecosystems, but battery equipment produces far fewer greenhouse gases.

Over 100 towns in the U.S. have banned gas blowers, at least during the summer, Burlington, VT, being the most recent on the East Coast.

Our suburban yards have become toxic sinks of pesticides, Weed 'n Seed products, synthetic fertilizers, loud industrial noise, and air pollution. Eliminating gas leaf blower use would be a start to tackling our nefarious yard care industry and its lack of respect for nature.

For more info, check the Quiet Clean NOVA [Facebook](#) page or [website](#). See website for petition.

Sincerely,
Board member of Friends of Accotink Creek

Friends of Accotink Creek

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