

Small Engine Lawn and Garden Equipment

This attachment responds to a City Council request ([2020.IE15.8](#)) to report on the environmental and associated health impacts of gasoline-powered, two-stroke engine leaf blowers and other similarly operated garden equipment, including the feasibility of a year-round ban or a ban from May to September.

City staff included an assessment of this issue in previous Transform TO reporting ([2017.PE19.4, Attachment C](#)). The assessment indicated that motor vehicle traffic is the biggest local source of air pollution and air pollution-related health effects in Toronto¹, and the contribution of small engine emissions to air pollution in Toronto was considered minimal in the context of all sources.

Greenhouse (GHG) emissions from burning fossil fuels in small engines such as leaf blowers and other similar garden equipment are relatively low as compared to other sources of GHG emissions in Toronto. According to the City's 2019 inventory of community-wide GHG emissions, the largest source of GHG emissions in Toronto is natural gas used for space heating in buildings.

The U.S. state of California recently enacted legislation requiring the California Air Resources Board to adopt regulations to prohibit engine exhaust and evaporative emissions from small off-road engine equipment (including but not limited to leaf blowers) that emit above a particular threshold and provide rebates or other incentives to support the transition to net-zero small off-road engine equipment (https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB1346).

In Canada, the Federal Government regulates air emissions from lawn and garden equipment through its Off-Road Small Spark-Ignition Engine Emission Regulations. In light of the state of California's new legislation, the City will advocate in writing to the Government of Canada to consider amending the regulations to support the transition to lawn and garden equipment with zero GHG and air pollutant emissions.

Whereas regulating the air emissions from small off-road engines is largely a federal matter, regulating the noise from the equipment containing these engines is largely a municipal matter. Toronto's Noise By-law (Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 591) was comprehensively reviewed in 2019, including the regulation of two-stroke lawn and garden equipment ([2019.EC3.6](#)). As a result of the review, Council further restricted the use of power devices, such as leaf blowers, by two hours. The Noise By-law currently stipulates that noise is not permitted from power devices from 7 p.m. until 7 a.m. the next day, except until 9 a.m. on Saturdays, Sundays and statutory holidays. These rules do not apply to devices used to maintain golf courses or public parks and to snow removal devices. During the review, staff considered a ban on leaf blowers, however it was determined that banning leaf blowers is overly restrictive based on the low volume of complaints, low public support, practicality of enforcing the ban, and unintended effects on City, industry and consumers. More information is available in the report [Noise By-law Review - Proposed Amendments to Chapter 591, Noise](#) (pages 21 - 23).

¹ Toronto Public Health (2014). Path to Healthier Air: Toronto Air Pollution Burden of Illness Update.

The Municipal Licensing and Standard Division intends to address City Council's request ([2020.IE15.8](#)) about the noise impacts of leaf blowers and related equipment next year as part of its noise update report.

Toronto Public Health (TPH) has reviewed this analysis by the Environment and Energy Division. TPH concludes that the noise, dust, and air pollution resulting from the use of small engines (leaf blowers) constitutes a nuisance that can be addressed through municipal bylaws but not a public health harm that the Health Protection and Promotion Act would address.