



SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL
CENTRAL STAFF

Gas-Powered Leaf Blower Phase Out (Resolution 32064)

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SUSTAINABILITY AND RENTERS' RIGHTS COMMITTEE

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Presentation Overview

- Environmental & Health Impacts
- Additional Background
- Jurisdictions with Leaf Blower Use Restrictions
- Overview of Resolution 32064
- Considerations

Environmental & Health Impacts

- Workers in the landscape services industry are most likely to experience negative health impacts from the use of leaf blowers
- Noise: human ear is sensitive to low frequency sounds produced by gas blowers; potential for permanent hearing damage
- Emissions
 - Minor source of greenhouse gas emissions
 - Produce hydrocarbons and other toxins that form ozone that can cause various health problems
 - Regular exposure to fine particulate matter can cause negative cardiovascular and respiratory effects and is linked to other adverse health outcomes

Background: Previous Policy Efforts

- Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI) 70-1-A-1 (2014) requested recommendations to reduce emissions and noise from gas-powered leaf blowers; department response recommended changes to procurement policies, increased inter-departmental communication, and outreach
- Green Sheet 139-1-A-1 (2018) added funding for an ongoing position in the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) to support various projects, resulting in the publication of a leaf blower use best practices guide for the public and those in the landscaping industry
- SLI OSE-003-B-001 (2022) requested development of a plan to phase out the use of all gas-powered leaf blowers within the next two years

Background: Current Regulations & Enforcement

- Leaf blower use is regulated via the Noise Code, administered by SDCI
- Noise caused by construction, landscape maintenance, and similar activities is limited to certain hours, depending on the zoning category
- Normal operation of a leaf blower during allowed hours complies with the code; operating a leaf blower outside of these hours is a likely violation
- SDCI will investigate complaints against commercial landscaping companies, but not those between neighbors

Background: City Inventory of Leaf Blowers

Seattle City Department	Type	2014	2022	Change
Parks and Recreation	Gas	125	270	145
	Electric	0	30	30
Transportation	Gas	29	76	47
	Electric	0	1	1
City Light	Gas	13	34	21
	Electric	9	13	4
Seattle Center	Gas	12	12	0
	Electric	0	6	6
Fire Department	Gas	9	21	12
	Electric	7	10	3
Public Utilities	Gas	19	5	(14)
	Electric	0	3	3
Finance and Administrative Services	Gas	4	0	(4)
	Electric	5	7	2
Totals	Gas	211	418	207
	Electric	21	70	49

Jurisdictions with Leaf Blower Use Restrictions

- Over 170 jurisdictions in 31 states have some type of restriction on the use of leaf blowers
 - Most limit the hours or season in which leaf blowers may be used
 - Over 40 have banned the use of gas-powered leaf blowers
- Washington, D.C. – ban on sale and use of gas-powered leaf blowers
- Multnomah County – expediting transition of County-owned leaf blowers to electric and partnering with City of Portland to form a workgroup to propose a future countywide ban
- California – will ban the sale of gas-powered lawn and garden equipment beginning in 2024

Overview of Resolution 32064

The resolution would establish the following goals:

- By January 2025, or later if necessary, the City and its contractors will phase out the use of gas-powered leaf blowers; and
- By January 2027, or later if necessary, institutions located in Seattle, businesses operating in Seattle, and Seattle residents will phase out the use of gas-powered leaf blowers.

Overview of Resolution 32064 (cont.)

- Departments that use gas-powered leaf blowers are requested to:
 - Evaluate current practices and explore options to reduce reliance on leaf blowers generally; and
 - Develop and implement plans to ensure that City facilities and employees are equipped to use electric blowers.

Overview of Resolution 32064 (cont.)

- Other requested actions:
 - Seattle Public Utilities, SDCI, Office of Labor Standards, and Department of Neighborhoods to develop and implement a culturally- and linguistically-appropriate education and outreach strategy to communicate the negative health and environmental impacts of gas leaf blowers and encourage residents to use less polluting and quieter alternatives; and
 - Department of Finance and Administrative Services and SDCI to develop a proposal to phase out and ban the use of all gas leaf blowers in Seattle
- Executive is requested to provide a proposed work program, timeline, and budget to the Council by December 2, 2022

Considerations

- Department staff have indicated that they do not have sufficient resources to conduct the requested actions, which could result in departments shifting staff away from work on other City priorities, or forgoing work on the proposed phase out
- Council may want to consider adding resources to support development of this effort during its forthcoming budget deliberations

Questions?