



Policy Recommendations on Gas Leaf Blowers

Excerpted from Final Report of the Joint County-City Leaf Blowers Policy Work Group: [Process Summary and Recommendations Regarding the Regulation of Gasoline-powered Leaf Blowers](#)

(Delivered to Multnomah County Commissioner Jessica Vega Pederson
and City of Portland Commissioner Carmen Rubio, 12/9/2022)

This work group strongly believes that the recognized health impacts of gas leaf blowers (GLBs) justify a ban on the use and sale of GLBs, particularly because the adverse health impacts - from both dangerous emissions and damagingly loud noise - fall disproportionately on hired landscape maintenance workers from communities of color, low-income communities, and other historically marginalized populations.

Should that prove infeasible, the work group believes Multnomah County should ban the use and sale of GLBs in unincorporated areas, if and only if that policy is crafted in tandem with a City of Portland policy banning the use and sale of GLBs within the City. Ideally, other incorporated jurisdictions in the county would be encouraged to do the same.

Therefore, the work group urges Commissioners Vega Pederson and Rubio to closely consult with County and City attorneys, the County Health Department, and other relevant stakeholders to make a fully-informed decision about the appropriate authority to be used to enact a ban on the use and sale of gas powered leaf blowers.

Should it be necessary to enact a policy addressing the nuisance impacts of GLBs, the work group urges the City and County to work in tandem to enact policies regulating the use and sale of GLBs uniformly in both unincorporated Multnomah County and the City of Portland.

The following recommendations are applicable to both a County action using the local public health authority and joint action by the City and County.

1. Enact a ban on the sale and use of gasoline powered leaf blowers, beginning as early as January, 2024

This policy should prohibit both the sale and use of the devices, ensuring that future sales of this equipment within Multnomah County are restricted to electric models, and that existing GLBs in the community are phased out as quickly as possible. Having the policy take effect as early as January 2024 rather than immediately upon passing allows for (a) additional time for more electric devices to become available on the market; (b) an outreach and education effort by the County and City; and (c) adequate time for the enforcing jurisdiction to build up the necessary capacity to implement and enforce the policy.

2. Ensure the policy applies to as much of Multnomah County as possible, including its incorporated cities

This could be accomplished by enacting a county-wide policy using the public health authority that would cover the entire county, both incorporated and unincorporated areas. In the view of the work group, the next best option is joint action by the City of Portland and Multnomah County encompassing all of the City plus unincorporated areas of Multnomah County. In this case, additional outreach should be done to the other cities in Multnomah County to urge them to enact similar policies covering their jurisdictions.

3. Establish a grace period between when the policy takes effect and when enforcement begins

The work group believes that a grace period of six months between the policy taking effect and the beginning of enforcement should be granted in order to conduct education and outreach to businesses that use or sell leaf blowers, and to the public.

4. Seek opportunities to provide financial support to businesses affected by this policy, particularly small businesses

Landscape contractors, the primary type of small business that utilizes these devices, may be adversely impacted by this policy because many still use GLBs and expect to use them for several more years until they need to be replaced. The work group strongly believes that in order to address the perceived inequities inherent in this policy (i.e., small businesses are perceived to be impacted more heavily) financial support should be made available to such businesses, and potentially residents, who are adversely affected. These resources could be provided using government funds, targeted funds from the PCEF program, rebates provided by a local electric utility company, a combination of these sources, or a source not identified in this report.

5. Ensure that the appropriate jurisdiction has the necessary capacity and resources

Regardless of which jurisdiction implements and enforces this policy, additional resources will be necessary to conduct education and outreach to ensure compliance. Those resources will likely include funds for public communications and additional staff capacity for monitoring, outreach and enforcement.

6. Utilize an education-first implementation approach and use punitive enforcement only as a last resort

With the shift to electric models already underway, the work group hopes that punitive measures such as fines will only be necessary as a last resort. Initial violations of the policy should result in proactive engagement and education in addition to a warning or citation, with fees being levied only as a last resort after multiple infractions. The fine could be levied on the property owner or property manager, the contractor, the contractor's hired employee, or some combination of these. Each has a different impact on ease of enforcement and required resources, which should be considered by policymakers. The policy could potentially allow citizen reports (complete with photo, address and time of violation) to be sufficient to issue a warning or citation.

7. Advocate for state-level action from the Oregon Legislature to phase out the use of GLBs in Oregon and/or the metro region

Advocates and work group members have had several discussions with state legislators regarding the possibility of enacting a ban on the use and/or sale of GLBs at the state level, applied either to the entire state or to the metro region. The work group urges the commissioners to continue to work with state legislators to develop a legislative proposal.

8. Consider the inclusion of additional gasoline-powered lawn equipment in this policy

Other forms of gasoline-powered lawn equipment, such as weed whackers and hedge trimmers, have similar adverse community impacts as GLBs, and some jurisdictions have included those devices in policies regulating GLBs. The work group recommends the consideration of including those devices in this policy to accelerate the transition to electric lawn equipment.

9. To accelerate the transition to electric leaf blowers within government, institutions and the landscaping industry, consider modifying expectations of when and at what level leaf blowers are necessary

Throughout the work group's discussions, the theme of modifying expectations around landscaping goals arose repeatedly. Organizations with large green spaces, such as the Portland Parks Bureau, often struggle to complete the transition to all-electric devices due to the lack of available electric devices with the high levels of power deemed necessary to perform the toughest jobs. But with modified expectations, such work may be done differently or may not be needed at all. Modifying landscaping expectations and better aligning them with sustainable grounds maintenance practices would allow those organizations and institutions to more quickly complete the transition to electric devices.

10. Consider establishing or promoting existing recycling programs for old GLBs in order to mitigate the environmental impacts of devices being transitioned out for electric alternatives

Recognizing that transitioning GLBs currently in circulation to electric devices will require the disposal or recycling of GLBs, the work group recommends establishing partnerships with private, public or nonprofit entities when crafting this policy to facilitate the sustainable recycling of GLBs to the maximum extent possible.