

Small Gas-Powered Engine Phase-Out in Favour of Zero-Emission Outdoor Power Equipment

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This brief summarizes the reasons for supporting a small off-road gas engine phase out for cities.

Overview – Small Gas-Powered Engines

Small off-road gas engines (2-stroke engines) are used in older outdoor maintenance equipment, and produce a lot of noise and air pollution.¹ They also produce ground and water pollution when gas and oil sprays or leaks from the devices and settle in the neighbourhood environment. Details of the health and environmental costs can be found [here](#).²

Since these devices are designed to be cheap and light, they lack the pollution control (and mufflers) of more sophisticated engines. They are also designed to burn oil as they operate. Thus, the smog and small particulate pollution they produce is particularly hazardous to the health of nearby residents. It is significantly worse than car exhaust.³ Their noise pollution also adversely affects human longevity.

Moreover, these devices are often not well maintained, and the pollution gets substantially worse as they age and start to burn and leak even more oil and gas. Battery powered alternatives now exist for these devices, which eliminate the air and water pollution and drastically reduce the noise pollution. Switching to these options would improve the health of the residents, the workers, and even the animal and plant life of the city. The small 2-stroke gas powered devices in question include⁴:

- Gas-powered push lawn mowers
- Gas-powered leaf blowers
- Gas-powered chainsaws
- Other portable gas-powered lawn equipment
- Gas-powered pressure washers
- Gas-powered temporary water pumps
- Small gas-powered generators (depending on the legislation).

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¹ For example, an hour's use of a gas-powered leaf blower produces the same amount of emissions as driving 100 miles, according to the Air Resources Board. *Gas lawn equipment is horrible for health – here's how these cities are fixing it*, Jameson Dow, Oct 17 2024 <https://electrek.co/2024/10/17/gas-lawn-equipment-is-horrible-for-health-heres-how-these-cities-are-fixing-it/>

² *Gas lawn equipment is horrible for health – here's how these cities are fixing it*, Jameson Dow, Oct 17 2024 <https://electrek.co/2024/10/17/gas-lawn-equipment-is-horrible-for-health-heres-how-these-cities-are-fixing-it/>
Lawn care goes electric, Clean air, October 30, 2023, <https://pirg.org/edfund/resources/lawn-care-goes-electric/>

³ *Gas lawn equipment is horrible for health – here's how these cities are fixing it*, Jameson Dow, Oct 17 2024 <https://electrek.co/2024/10/17/gas-lawn-equipment-is-horrible-for-health-heres-how-these-cities-are-fixing-it/>

⁴ The 2-stroke gas engines in dirt bikes, some small scouters, small old motorcycles, gas-powered bikes, and small outboard engines have the same problems, but are generally exempt from city legislation and these phase-outs (provided they are otherwise road or water legal). Although they are being replaced in the market by battery-powered versions which are becoming cheaper, safer, and more reliable.

Small Gas-Powered Engine *cont.*

Phase-Outs / Bans

A number of cities and states have started to phase out or ban these devices, to encourage people to switch to healthier less polluting alternatives.⁵ This is particularly important to encourage the least responsible people and businesses, who might not otherwise switch to better alternatives. These gas engines are not just bad for the citizens and neighbours, but the users of these engines (like landscapers) are exposed to a lot of cancer-causing exhaust.

The bans or phase-outs generally ban the sale of new gas-powered devices in question, but allow people to continue to use older equipment. The idea is that laggards will transition as their old equipment fails and they are forced to buy quiet safe electrical equipment in its place. Some cities have decided to transition the city-owned equipment to electric ahead of the ban, to accelerate the transition (and protect their resident and workers health). Some cities have specifically banned the use of specific gas-powered equipment outright, particularly gas-powered leaf blowers.⁶

The most notable phase out is that California phased out these small off road engines starting in 2024. The phase out bans the sale of new small engine gas-powered equipment.⁷

Toronto and the Phase-out

Toronto City Council has discussed phasing out the small gas engine outdoor equipment for almost 25 years. It keeps voting to reject the phase outs, under pressure from lawncare business organizations, while voting to reconsider it again in a few years. The details of the submission for 2025 to Toronto City Council can be found [here](#).⁸ Most recently, it voted in 2025 to reconsider the phase-out again in 2027.⁹

This is ridiculous. Battery-powered equipment is cheap and reliable. The health, well-being, and quiet enjoyment of the citizens and the workers should take priority. I hope that by creating support among neighbourhood associations for the phase out, Toronto City Council will finally have the backbone in 2027 to start the gas-powered equipment phase out that California has already implemented.

⁵ *Interactive map of lawn mower and leaf blower policies*, Clean air, October 16, 2024, <https://pirg.org/edfund/resources/interactive-map-of-lawn-mower-and-leaf-blower-policies/>

⁶ *Walnut Creek Agrees to Ban Gas Powered Leaf Blowers*, CC News, 11/05/2025 <https://contracosta.news/2025/11/05/walnut-creek-agrees-to-ban-gas-powered-leaf-blowers/>

⁷ *Gavin Newsom signs law banning sale of new gas-powered leaf blowers*, lawn mowers by 2024, Andrew Sheeler, October 10, 2021 <https://www.sacbee.com/news/politics-government/capitol-alert/article254416318.html#storylink=cpy>; *Silence of the lawns: How noise ordinances, gas equipment bans and robot mowers are changing yard care*, Sav Maive, October 9, 2025, <https://www.aol.com/articles/silence-lawns-noise-ordinances-gas-180007062.html>

⁸ *Transitioning towards zero-emission outdoor power equipment*, Executive Director, Environment, Climate and Forestry Division, April 23, 2025 <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2025/ie/bgrd/backgroundfile-254859.pdf>

⁹ *City Council Consideration on May 21 and 22, 2025, Item - 2025.IE21.4*, <https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.IE21.4>

¹⁰ *Transitioning towards zero-emission outdoor power equipment*, Executive Director, Environment, Climate and Forestry Division, April 23, 2025 <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2025/ie/bgrd/backgroundfile-254859.pdf>

¹¹ *City Council Consideration on May 21 and 22, 2025, Item - 2025.IE21.4*, <https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.IE21.4>