

Board votes to phase out gas-powered leaf blowers

December 16, 2021

The Board of County Commissioners voted to phase out gas-powered leaf blowers Thursday, Dec. 16, setting a timeline for the County's shift from the devices and taking steps to support a community-wide transition to electric and battery-powered alternatives.

The Board approved four actions: transitioning county leaf blower use from gas-powered leaf blowers to electric models before 2025; ensuring adequate charging infrastructure for electric leaf blowers; using awareness campaigns to educate the public about the impacts of gas powered leaf blowers; and developing a work group, in partnership with the City of Portland, exploring an equitable, community-wide transition to sustainable alternatives.



(Left to right): Stanley Penkin of Quiet Clean PDX and Hayden Miller, policy advisor to Commissioner Jessica Vega Pederson, testify on gas-powered leaf blowers.

“We know that these devices are harmful to our communities — mainly because they use old technology like two-stroke engines, which mix and leak oil and gasoline and emit harmful toxins,” said [Commissioner Jessica Vega Pederson](#), who sponsored the resolution.

The board's vote is the latest action in the County's ongoing effort to address the climate crisis. In 2017, Multnomah County and the City of Portland announced a joint effort to achieve 100% carbon-free electricity community-wide by 2035, and 100% carbon-free energy in all sectors by 2050.

"In 2017, the most recent year with available data, gasoline was responsible for 25% of Multnomah County's carbon emissions," said Vega Pederson. "While much of that comes from on-road vehicles, emissions from gas-powered leaf blowers are also contributors and our actions to phase out these devices will aid in our efforts to address the climate crisis."

The county joins at least 44 local jurisdictions nationwide that have enacted bans on gas-powered leaf blowers as of December 2021. Notably, in October 2021 the state of California passed legislation phasing out the sale of gas powered leaf blowers in the state by 2024.

"I think this is absolutely the right thing to do," said [Commissioner Lori Stegmann](#), encouraging leaders at the state legislature and the federal level to consider taking similar action.

The County received extensive community feedback during the drafting of the resolution, along with 162 submissions of written testimony. Commissioner Vega Pederson's office also consulted with community advocates, including [Quiet Clean PDX\(link is external\)](#), and representatives from the local landscaping industry.

"Gas leaf blowers are a danger to the environment and to the health and livability of all who live, work, and play in Multnomah County, and especially to those who operate them," said Stanley Penken of Quiet Clean PDX.

Two-stroke combustion engines, commonly used in gas-powered leaf blowers, mix oil and gasoline and emit harmful substances including carbon monoxide, nitrous oxides, ozones, and carcinogens. It's estimated that one-hour of operation emits the same amount of pollutants as driving a Toyota Camry about 1,100 miles, or the distance from Portland to San Diego.

Gas-powered leaf blowers also contribute to hearing damage and noise pollution. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, extended exposure to sounds at or above 85 decibels can damage hearing. Gas-powered leaf blowers frequently exceed those levels, harming operators and causing noise pollution to nearby residents and businesses.

The County currently utilizes gas-powered leaf blowers to meet its facilities needs. The County's current landscaping contract phases out the devices by June 30, 2025. Inmate work crews with the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office also utilize gas-powered leaf blowers.

“Air quality has been one of my priorities since taking office,” [Commissioner Susheela Jayapal](#) said in a statement. “My district experiences some of the worst air in Multnomah County and this resolution to transition County-used leaf blowers to electric is a step in the right direction for protecting the health of our community. Thank you Quiet Clean PDX for your tireless advocacy on this issue and Commissioner Vega Pederson for sponsoring this resolution.”

Thursday’s vote also affirms the county’s commitment to working with the City of Portland on a community transition away from gas-powered leaf blowers.

In December 2019, the City of Portland passed a resolution, sponsored by late Commissioner Nick Fish, directing city bureaus to transition from gas-powered leaf blowers to electric or battery-powered devices. It also called for a workgroup to consider an equitable city-wide transition to electric or battery-powered leaf blowers. To ensure the proposal does not inadvertently harm communities, the group will include voices most impacted by the transition.

“The County’s passage of this resolution is another exciting step forward and adds another jurisdiction for the groups who are pushing the industry to meet our needs,” said Portland City [Commissioner Carmen Rubio](#), [\(link is external\)](#) speaking as an invited guest during Thursday’s board meeting. Commissioner Rubio will work with Commissioner Vega Pederson on behalf of the city on outreach and next steps.

“We all know when it comes to the climate crisis that there’s always more that we can do to decrease emissions,” said [Chair Deborah Kafoury](#). “Taking steps to accelerate the timeline of the County’s own use of gas-powered leaf blowers to electric or battery powered is an important and necessary first step.”