



About Leaf Blowers

The engines of gasoline-powered leaf blowers produce emissions of nitrogen oxides and hydrocarbons, which can lead to the formation of smog. They also emit carbon monoxide, air toxics, and greenhouse gases. This pollution occurs when the engine is being used and during refueling. In addition, the use of leaf blowers stirs particles into the air, contributing to particulate matter pollution. Electric-powered leaf blowers are less polluting than gasoline-powered versions, but the same concerns and precautions still apply regarding stirring particles into the air.

APCD Role

Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District (APCD) receives calls from county residents concerned about the use of leaf blowers and the dust and exhaust that result from the equipment's use. Anyone who has ever seen this type of equipment in use recognizes that a considerable amount of pollution and noise is generated and affects local residents, businesses, and others who may be nearby.

Many people ask if there are regulations prohibiting or limiting the use of leaf blowers. APCD has no authority or plans to establish regulations for this type of equipment in Santa Barbara County due to several factors:

- APCD's regulatory authority is focused on emissions from stationary sources of pollution, such as gas stations, dry cleaners, diesel generators, and oil and gas operations.
- Emissions from small off-road engines, including those in leaf blowers, are regulated by California Air Resources Board, which has formed a working group aimed at reducing emissions from those types of engines: ww2.arb.ca.gov/our-work/programs/small-off-road-engines.
- APCD is not aware of any local air district in California that currently regulates, or has plans to regulate, leaf blowers.
 - Many cities in California, including the City of Santa Barbara, have municipal codes restricting leaf blower use.

APCD has a general nuisance rule prohibiting the discharge of any air contaminants that cause a public nuisance, with some exceptions. However, due to factors including duration of use, size of areas affected, and number of complaints about any one particular instance, the use of leaf blowers has not risen to the level of a public nuisance. However, the use of leaf blowers can cause private nuisances to people in neighborhoods.

Complaints

If you are affected by dust or pollution from leaf blowers, you can make a complaint with APCD. See more information on APCD's complaint process: www.ourair.org/complaints/

In the City of Santa Barbara, there is a ban on gas-powered leaf blowers (Municipal Code 9.16.060), and all leaf blowers used within City of Santa Barbara limits are subject to restrictions on leaf blower use (Municipal Code 9.16.050). People can contact the City of Santa Barbara police department regarding complaints related to those codes.

Wildfires and other Air Quality Events

Leaf blowers should not be used while there are large amounts of ash in the environment, such as during or immediately after a wildfire. During situations like those, the leaf blowers can force ash particles that have settled on the ground back into the air. That causes the ash particles to break down into smaller, more harmful particles that can affect lung and heart health, and ash can contain metals and chemicals. Using leaf blowers during times like those can result in a violation of APCD regulations due to the effects to public health.

Alternatives to Leaf Blowers

APCD is considering creating a voluntary incentive program to electrify lawn and garden equipment, including leaf blowers. This would be in line with what other local air districts throughout California have done, where gas-powered equipment is replaced with electric versions, reducing overall emissions. However, changing the type of engine does not eliminate the concerns regarding particulate matter that is stirred up during leaf blower use.

Common concerns from industry regarding electric leaf blowers involve some limitations of battery-powered and corded equipment. Alternatives to leaf blowers in general, such as raking or sweeping, are estimated to lead to significant increases in labor for commercial landscaping companies, and therefore increased costs to clients. Some alternatives are not feasible for certain terrains or ground cover conditions. Different alternatives are feasible depending on residential versus commercial uses.

Best Practices

- Be a considerate neighbor — ask neighbors if leaf blowers affect them. In warm weather, people like to leave windows open, and dust can be blown into homes.
- When possible, try alternatives: gently sweeping with a push broom, or using a high-quality shop vacuum with a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter and disposable filter bag.
- Be aware of wind direction and of whether children are outside nearby.