

MYTHBUSTERS: The Truth About Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers (GLBs)*

The Claim	The Truth
<p>There are only a “few” studies that link GLBs to health issues.</p>	<p>NOT TRUE: Hundreds of studies link the noise and air emissions produced by GLBs to serious health issues, including lung cancer, asthma, heart disease, hypertension, heart attacks, heart failure, strokes, lung disease, asthma, COPD, acute respiratory infections, hearing damage, tinnitus, neurological disorders (including dementia, autism, and Reynaud’s), developmental disorders (including reproductive, metabolic, and psychological), and learning and concentration issues (especially in children). There are also scientific studies and government and medical publications addressing the levels of exposure and consequent harms specific to leaf blowers and other gas-powered lawn and gardening equipment.</p>
<p>The health risks from GLBs are overblown.</p>	<p>NOT TRUE: The main hydrocarbons produced by GLBs (benzene, butadiene, and formaldehyde) are listed among the four top-ranking cancer-causing compounds in the world. Moreover, a single commercial backpack GLB emits about 30,000,000 micrograms of fine particulate exhaust <i>per hour</i>, all of which is at ground level and easily inhaled by workers and residents. These particles may stay suspended in the air for a week or longer—and they are so tiny that they pass through lung tissue and into the human bloodstream, which makes them “particularly” hazardous to health. Even short-term exposure to fine particulate matter has been linked to serious health effects and higher risk of death. In 2013, the WHO concluded that fine particulate matter is associated with increased cancer incidence, specifically lung and bladder cancers. Blowers and other handheld tools account for the vast majority of fine particulate from lawn and gardening equipment.</p>
<p>The pollution risks from GLBs are overblown.</p>	<p>NOT TRUE: One independent vehicle emissions testing lab found that, when it comes to producing hydrocarbons, running a GLB for 30 minutes was the same as driving a Ford F-150 truck from Texas to Alaska. The California Air Resources Board equates the pollution from an hour of GLB use to driving 1,100 miles in a 2016 Toyota Camry. California air quality officials state that, in 2020, leaf blowers and other small gas engines used in lawn maintenance and gardening will create more hydrocarbon-based ozone pollution than all of the passenger cars in the state.</p>
<p>A summer ban on GLBs will hurt landscapers.</p>	<p>NOT TRUE: Blowing grass clippings during the summer is purely a cosmetic practice (see below). Moreover, you do not need 200+ mph air-jets to do it—other alternatives exist. By abandoning GLBs, landscapers will save money (i.e., on fuel and maintenance) and time (i.e., labor). In fact, landscapers may even be able to service more customers as a result.</p>
<p>Phasing out GLBs is not feasible—we still need them for big cleanups.</p>	<p>NOT TRUE: More than 200 towns around the country, including a number in Westchester County and New England (which have lots of leaves), have restricted GLBs. Landscapers have adapted by: (i) using rakes; (ii) leaving the leaves in place and mulching, which is better for the environment; and/or (iii) switching to modern electric/battery equipment, which today is far more powerful than in the past. Hundreds of profitable landscape companies around the country are offering greener alternatives at competitive prices.</p>

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*For more details and additional information, visit www.quietcommunities.org

<p>Enforcing a ban on GLBs will be difficult and expensive.</p>	<p>NOT TRUE: Citizen reporting using cell phones and videos makes it easy to report a violation. Notification of the restriction by towns can be sent out digitally or by mail. And residents are quick to adapt when they realize that there are fines. A number of towns have found that the fines (which ratchet up after the first violation) more than offset any extra police time necessary for enforcement.</p>
<p>Banning leaf blowers is an illegal “restraint of trade.”</p>	<p>NOT TRUE: In the past, a few landscapers and landscaper associations (notably in CA and NJ) tried to challenge town ordinances on that ground, but they all lost in court. Arguments based on protection of the health and welfare of citizens has proven to be sufficient rationale for restrictions. As long as the ordinance does not discriminate among users, the courts have upheld them.</p>
<p>The noise from GLBs is not that bad; some people are just too sensitive.</p>	<p>NOT TRUE: The noise from commercial GLBs is literally deafening—even by the industry’s own admission. Indeed, the noise from a commercial GLB typically exceeds 100 decibels at the source and 76 decibels even at fifty feet. (Sixty decibels is sufficient to raise blood pressure.) Moreover, according to the US CDC and NIOSH, the maximum recommended exposure to 100 decibel noise is 15 minutes. Landscapers operate GLBs for hours a day, several days a week, often in groups of two or more, thereby exposing workers and the public to chronic levels of harmful noise. In addition, GLB noise has a strong low frequency component (LFN), enabling it to travel long distances and penetrate walls and windows. That’s why a single GLB can disrupt an entire neighborhood. In fact, LFN is the type of noise considered most dangerous to overall health. The adverse health effects of such noise are well documented: hearing loss; heart disease; sleep disturbance; psychological, cognitive and learning problems; and metabolic abnormalities.</p>
<p>GLBs are irrelevant when it comes to COVID-19.</p>	<p>NOT TRUE: Because the emissions from these machines compromise respiratory health, they may affect your ability to fight COVID-19 if you contract it. In fact, Harvard researchers have specifically linked the type of pollution generated by GLBs to a higher risk of complications and death from a COVID-19 infection. They found that a 1-microgram increase in concentration of fine particulate matter was associated with an 8% increase in risk of death from a COVID-19 infection. Since one commercial GLB emits tens of millions of micrograms of fine particulate matter per hour—and all at ground level where it hangs around and is easily inhaled—this is significant. And this is compounded by the fact that crews often use multiple machines several days a week. Moreover, preliminary studies have found that the COVID-19 virus can piggyback on airborne particulates, raising the possibility that blowers such air conditioners, hair dryers, and GLBs can contribute to the spread of disease.</p>
<p>Blowing grass clippings is necessary for a healthy lawn.</p>	<p>NOT TRUE: In fact, it is exactly the opposite. This practice actually deprives the lawn of essential nutrients. Grass clippings are good for lawns because they turn into natural fertilizer. Clippings are composed primarily of water and nitrogen—the very things that a lawn needs to stay healthy. Leaving the clippings in place allows them the chance to decompose, releasing water and nutrients back into the soil, which in turn makes the lawn greener, healthier, and thicker. (If you don’t believe it, check out “Why Grass Clippings are Good for Lawns” at www.Lawndoctor.com or “What To Do With Grass Clippings” at www.scotts.com) And by the way, contrary to popular myth, leaving the clippings in place does not cause thatch (which is actually a layer of partially decomposed grass-plant parts between the soil and live grass). According to the experts at Scotts, “Grass clippings are mostly water, so as long as you mow regularly at the right height, they will break down and disappear rapidly.”</p>

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