

Subject: [Fwd: NPC Quietnet: CQS Positions-CLCA Statements]

Date: Tue, 06 Nov 2001 15:40:16 -0800

From: Brian Platts <brian_platts@telus.net>

To: Corrie Kost <kost@triumf.ca>

Subject: NPC Quietnet: CQS Positions-CLCA Statements

Date: Tue, 06 Nov 2001 12:55:41 -0800

From: Corrie Kost <kost@triumf.ca>

To: Agnes Hilsen <ahilsen@district.north-van.bc.ca>, bill denault <bill_denault@dnv.org>, Don Bell <belld@district.north-van.bc.ca>, Doug MacKay-Dunn <doug_mackay-dunn@dnv.org>, Ernie Crist <criste@dnv.org>, Janice Harrisj <harrisj@district.north-van.bc.ca>, Lisa Muri <muril@dnv.org>, heather dunsford <heather_dunsford@dnv.org>

CC: council@dnv.org, fonvca@fonvca.org

Your Worship & Members of Council,

In my opinion your decision on the continued use of leaf blowers was not based soundly (pun intended) on the facts. I was saddened to see business interests dominate over the environmental impacts. One of the councillors got it right - the noise is not the dominant issue - the air pollution coming from the gas engines and ground dust is.

Please read the attached article which says it much better than I can.

Yours truly,

Corrie Kost

<http://www.nonoise.org/quietnet/cqs/clcapos.htm>



CQS Rebuttal to the CLCA Position on Leaf Blowers*

** a document circulated by the California Landscape Contractors Association (CLCA), June 1997*

CLCA: "A ban should be a last resort."

Our response: Citizens all over California, including those in Sacramento, are seeking this "last resort" because other measures have been tried and proved inadequate. Many cities, including Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, had noise limits before they imposed bans. Sacramento has noise limits on its books today, and city staff have stated "Enforcement of dBA limits is not practical in actual field practice."

CLCA: "Leaf blowers are essential for landscape maintenance professionals."

Our response: Professionals in 20 California cities work without gasoline-powered leaf blowers today, and blower use is not

widespread in many other states and countries.

Although the advent of blowers has brought with it a trend toward leaf-free lawns and barren flower beds, many people consider this artificial and unnatural. Even many landscape professionals agree that stripping a garden of its natural layer of mulch is bad for the plants, thus diminishing their natural beauty (and increasing the need for water, an often-scarce resource in California).

CLCA: "Leaf blowers save enormous amounts of time."

Our response: Leaf blowers save time on certain jobs, but the "enormous" savings suggested by quotes from two cities are exaggerated. In San Luis Obispo, supervisors simply made estimates. The time savings quoted from the 1992 City of Whittier report (2.25 hours using leaf blower, 76 hours using hose, 282 hours using broom) are based on unrealistic premises and comparisons. The "efficiency factor" used to estimate that it would require 282 hours to sweep a 169,000-square-foot area is based on the premise that it requires 10 minutes to sweep 100 square feet--a 10 ft. x 10 ft. area. Common sense tells us this is ridiculous. A recent time trial by a Sacramento resident revealed that it took her only 1 minute 50 seconds to sweep her 177-square-foot sidewalk after edging her lawn. In 1990 the City of Claremont stopped using blowers in the maintenance of city property without a net increase in labor hours.

CLCA: "Many clients can't afford or are not willing to pay for the additional cost of performing landscape maintenance without the leaf blower."

Our response: As discussed above, we believe projected cost increases are exaggerated. In any case, lower costs do not justify any offensive, polluting activity. If they did, we would have no pollution controls of any kind. Most customers of landscaping service are fairly well-to-do, otherwise they would probably be performing their own yard work. It is not unreasonable to expect that they pay a modestly higher fee to preserve their neighbors' peace and clean air. Alternatively, they could negotiate a more natural-looking level of maintenance for their landscapes that did not depend on blower use. We believe that most homeowners will choose to pay a little more or accept a little less. Those who could not find time to do their own lawns before would hardly be more likely to do so if the process became more labor-intensive.

CLCA: "Leaf blower bans have been difficult to enforce..."

Our response: Citizens for a Quieter Sacramento called 14 of the 20 California cities with current bans and found no reports of enforcement difficulties.

CLCA: "Unlicensed operators would [flout] a leaf blower ban if given the chance, and consequently would be able to underbid our members..."

Our response: All leaf blower bans depend on citizen reporting to initiate enforcement. Unlicensed operators would be the last ones to bring attention to themselves by openly breaking the law; but if they did, they would be subject to reporting by citizens (including CLCA members!) and citation and fine that would remove any economic incentive to disregard the ban.

CLCA: "Leaf blowers make no more noise than many other types of power equipment." "Residents and homeowners are exposed to leaf blower noise for only a few minutes a week..."

Our response: Leaf blower noise is uniquely irritating--a fact widely recognized by noise experts, reported in the press, and discussed in public debates. As reported in public testimony at the Sacramento Environmental Commission and Sacramento City Council Law & Legislation committee meetings, city residents often hear leaf blowers for extended periods and/or many times a day, in contrast to, say, chain saws that are an infrequent intrusion.

It's only common sense to acknowledge there's a reason that Echo's list of cities with leaf blower bans, ordinances, "activity," or "exposure" is 21 pages long. There is no similar movement to ban chain saws or lawn mowers, even though they have been in use for decades longer than leaf blowers.

CLCA: "Some of the newer machines are rated at, or less than, 70 decibels at 50 feet at full throttle."

Our response: Echo recently introduced a backpack blower that it claimed was the quietest on the market at 65 decibels, but Consumer Reports rated it at 69.4 dB. A report just issued by the City of Palo Alto says this blower measured 70-73 dB at 50 feet when tested by city staff. In any case, blowers are frequently used at less than 50 feet from passersby or neighboring residents. Further, CLCA fails to mention that Echo sells at least seven models of blowers (according to a recent Master Products Catalog). How can one model from one manufacturer have a significant impact on overall blower use?

All of society should be concerned about an instrument that can inflict serious disability on its user, even if not on others nearby. Leaf blowers are clearly loud enough to require hearing protection for the operators. A blower measuring 70-75 dB at 50 feet can reach 90-100 dB at the operator's ear. According to the American Academy of Otolaryngology, half the users of ear protectors do not receive the expected benefit because of improper fit or failure to wear them continuously. Anecdotal reports (including the interview in a

recent Sacramento Bee article by reporter Edie Lau) suggest that gardeners are suffering hearing impairment.

CLCA: "[Customers] should be informed about the noise levels of leaf blower equipment before purchase."

Our response: Certainly, and also about the noise limits specified by current ordinances. However, we have little hope that this will solve the problem, since it seems unlikely that any blower buyer today could still be unaware of his potential to disturb.

Perhaps manufacturers could label their louder blowers "not for use in residential areas"--or perhaps they could voluntarily stop manufacturing the worst offenders!

CLCA: "Cities, municipalities, and the CLCA should partner together to educate the public as well as the landscape industry about proper use of leaf blower equipment." "CLCA does not oppose ordinances that mandate common sense rules of leaf blower courtesy."

Our response: The level of public opposition to leaf blowers is clear evidence of the machines' propensity for misuse. We have all seen repeated examples--some would say they are the norm--of the behaviors CLCA suggests are inappropriate: use of multiple blowers at one location, use of blowers near windows, blowing debris onto neighboring properties or into the street, etc.

Unfortunately, no one can legislate good manners. Such rules would be even more unenforceable than the failed noise and time restrictions many cities have already tried. Imagine calling the city and expecting a response to a complaint about lack of courtesy!

The CLCA recommends blowers not be used during "unreasonable hours...when people are likely to be disturbed." Many people will be disturbed any time a blower is used! Today many people work at home; a large segment of our population is retired; and a large number of night workers, from nurses and police officers to convenience store clerks, must sleep during daytime hours.

CLCA: "The air emissions issue is a spurious issue when applied to local leaf blower regulations...Portable lawn and garden equipment contributes only 0.8 percent of all U.S. VOC emissions, 0.6 percent of carbon monoxide emissions..."

Our response: State and federal regulatory agencies consider leaf blowers and other gas-powered yard maintenance equipment to be much more serious sources of air pollution than does the CLCA. The U.S. EPA states that "small engines are big polluters." The Best Available Control Measures Working Group encourages citizens to "avoid using leaf blowers."

Leaf blowers generate air pollution in two ways--from engine emissions and dust blown up from the ground. The CLCA chooses to discuss VOCs (from engine emissions), but particulate matter (from the engines as well as from the entrained dust) is blowers' most significant contribution to pollution, as reported by the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District.

There are 20,000 people in the city of Sacramento with asthma or other respiratory diseases that can be aggravated by the dust clouds raised by leaf blowers. About a third to a quarter of the support for a leaf blower ban comes from those concerned mainly about air quality. Sacramento's air is among the nation's worst, and anything that could improve it should be encouraged. Every little bit helps!

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