

Attachment 4.

Information submitted by Julia Miller, former Sunnyvale Mayor, during the Sustainability Commission meeting on March 2, 2014

# City Council passes plan to reduce engine noise

By KELLY WILKINSON

The City Council passed an ordinance at its Tuesday meeting that creates stricter regulations on noisy machinery like leaf blowers, gasoline-powered hedgers and outdoor paging systems.

The ordinance limits the hours of operation of leaf-blowers and other small-engine equipment from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. seven days a week, at 65 decibels of sound or less. Currently, that type of equipment is allowed to be in operation between the hours of 7 a.m. and 10 p.m., seven days a week; there is no limitation on decibel levels.

Council voted 6-1 in favor of the ordinance. Councilmember Stan Kawczynski dissented, saying he would only back on outright ban on the blowers.

City Council also required that older, louder leaf blowers be replaced with quieter ones by Jan. 1, 2000. Outdoor paging systems at car dealerships must be eliminated by that date as well.

Approximately 25 members of the public—from professional, self-employed gardeners to retired citizens and home-based business owners who consider the noise disruptive and offensive—came out to voice opinions on the issue.

Some residents said noise created by

## Noise: City finds compromise on issue

*Continue from page 1*

leaf-blowers and other small-engine equipment disturbs their home and work environments. Gardeners said such tools reduce work hours, thereby keeping their service costs low.

Jane Bectel, a Sunnyvale resident and small-business owner who works from home, brought in a pair of ear guards similar to the kind used by airport workers that she wears while her neighbors have their lawn maintained by commercial gardeners.

Bectel said she used to think that people who complained about noise "were a bunch of fuddy-duddies, until they came to my street." Her recommendation to the council was to concentrate on restricting the decibel level of leaf-blowers to less than 65.

The most recent leaf-blower models emit 65 decibels of sound or less at 50 feet, but older models produce up to 94 decibels of sound at 50 feet, which pushes the sound level into the beginning of the unsafe range, according to a city staff report.

Ron Gutierrez, a self-employed professional gardener who already owns a 65-decibel leaf blower, argued against a sharp reduction in operation hours, saying that the leaf-blowers are "equipment necessary to my livelihood."

Gutierrez argued such a decision would lead to a proportionate reduction in his income, since these are machines central to his effectiveness.

Miller called the resolution a "win-win situation," speaking of the balance struck between residents and gardeners.

"It satisfied the clamor of the constituents, showed the council listened to their concerns, but didn't interfere with business."

Don Howard, manager of Gardenland in Campbell, has worked with several Silicon Valley cities in creating noise

legislation surrounding leaf-blowers.

"I think [Sunnyvale] is heading in the right direction," he said. "There will always be some people more satisfied than others, but it seems to be a reasonable solution."

Councilmembers Kawczynski and Jack Walker and members of the public also questioned the fact that the city exempted itself from its own noise restrictions.

"It would be very hard for citizens to make these changes and follow the rules if our own municipality doesn't have to do that," said Mary Kate Franci, a resident and home-based business owner.

City manager Bob LaSala argued that the exemption was necessary, since the city's services "ensure that [parks and streets] are available for public use in the morning."

"In terms of street sweeping, we make every effort to try and limit those activities in close proximity to residential areas," LaSala added.

The city staff is now specifying the language of the amended noise ordinance, in accordance with the changes at Tuesday's meeting. Council will review and approve of the language at a future meeting.

## Our Deadlines

We hate missing good stories because we learned about them too late. Most news items are due by noon Tuesday (eight days prior to publication). To assign a photograph, we usually need a week's notice.

Please send letters to the editor, press releases and story ideas to the THE SUN at our email address: [sun@sjmetro.com](mailto:sun@sjmetro.com).

Reach us by fax at 481-0175.

**Down to Two**

The field of Presidio developers has been narrowed

**A18****S.F. Budget Surplus**

Mayor Brown earmarks unexpected funds for Muni

**A18****Ethnic Studies**

UC Berkeley hunger strikers ignore offer on program funding

**A20**

San Francisco Chronicle

# PENINSULA

AND THE BAY AREA

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TUESDAY, MAY 4, 1999

A17

# Backtracking on Peninsula Leaf Blower Bans

Cities propose new tactics to reduce noise

By *Carolyn Zinko*  
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Last year, the buzz word was ban. This year, it's limits. Peninsula cities bent on abolishing leaf blowers are moving toward

less drastic approaches after fierce debate between residents and gardeners polarized several communities.

From Menlo Park to Palo Alto to Sunnyvale, city officials are proposing new tactics such as etiquette lessons for gardeners, noise standards requiring the use of quieter machines, and restrictions on the hours of operation.

Palo Alto's City Council got an earful last night at a show-and-tell at Rinconada Park, where several kinds of leaf blowers were fired up to dem-

onstrate the difference in sound quality and volume. The four gas leaf blowers and two electric blowers all had louder volumes than the decibel levels ascribed to them by the American National Standards Institute, according to Assistant Police Chief Lynne Johnson.

"The council has to see if it wants to use the ANSI standards or the real world standards, like today's test," Johnson said.

That could leave Palo Alto in a quandary.

"If tests indicate that manufactur-

ers ratings aren't valid, then we can't certify any machine," said Councilman Dick Rosenbaum.

Palo Alto police, who would enforce any noise ordinance, have been meeting for several months with gardeners and residents concerned about noise to come up with solutions that both sides can agree with.

The police proposal, scheduled to come before council members in coming months, calls for an ordinance that would require permits for all leaf blowers and limiting the

use of leaf blowers to models that run at 65 decibels or less at a distance of 50 feet.

Most older leaf blowers run at 70 decibels or more, while the latest models run at 65 decibels.

Police would conduct spot checks to ensure compliance. Currently, violators are fined \$104 if they go above 70 decibels.

Rosenbaum, in an April 27 letter to his colleagues, said he wants the issue brought before the council to

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## LEAF BLOWER BANS

California cities with bans on gasoline-powered leaf blowers (total means they also restrict electric-powered blowers):

- |                         |                        |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| ■ Belvedere             | ■ Los Altos            |
| ■ Berkeley              | ■ Los Angeles          |
| ■ Beverly Hills         | ■ Malibu               |
| ■ Carmel                | ■ Mill Valley          |
| ■ Claremont             | ■ Piedmont             |
| ■ Del Mar (total)       | ■ Santa Barbara        |
| ■ Hermosa Beach (total) | ■ Santa Monica (total) |
| ■ Indian Wells          | ■ West Hollywood       |
| ■ Laguna Beach (total)  |                        |
| ■ Lawndale              |                        |

Source: Citizens for a Quieter Sacramento, League of California Cities

# Leaf Blower Compromise

## ► ALTERNATIVES

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determine if there is support for an outright ban.

In Menlo Park, where voters last fall overturned a council-imposed leaf blower ban, city officials are now considering whether to limit use of the gardening machines to every other week — an idea that has also drawn public criticism.

The council may also be considering reduced hours of use and requiring gardeners to use quieter blowers, said Mayor Paul Collacchi.

Some council members also want to require city certification, in which quiet blowers would be tagged with a sticker police could readily identify, in addition to leaf-blower classes to teach workers proper ways to use the machines.

Before the council banned leaf blowers last April, hundreds of residents spoke out on both sides of the debate, and gardeners seeking compromise traded in old equipment for newer, lower-pitched models.

The ban reversal last fall stunned council members, who had approved the ban with the idea they were speaking for the majority of residents.

"Some say the election meant we should leave gardeners alone and drop it, while some say their vote to overturn the ban meant they favored quieter blowers," Collacchi

said. "There's a range in what people meant when they voted no . . . But most people agree quieter blowers are better. After that, I don't think we'll be able to do much more than that."

Sunnyvale's City Council has been looking for ways to reduce noise in the community, including the din of leaf blowers, since last September.

Some residents have asked for reductions in the hours of leaf blower use, which currently allows garden machines to be operated from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. The council appears to be leaning that way, and has directed staff to revise the noise ordinance to allow small machines to be operated from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., said David Vossbrink, a city spokesman.

The council, which will take up the revisions next month, did not consider a ban because it was "not high on the list of priorities for the majority of our citizens," Vossbrink said. "Different communities have different standards. One size does not fit all."

Even Portola Valley flirted with the idea of regulating leaf blowers to preserve peace and quiet in the woods above Interstate 280, but put the matter on the back burner after El Niño storms wreaked \$6 million worth of damage on local roads, making repairs a more pressing matter, said Alex McIntyre, the town administrator.

## Albany High School Places Fifth in U.S. Science Bowl

By Steve Rubenstein

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

It came down to one final question for the geniuses of Albany High School yesterday.

Unfortunately, the final question

was about integral calculus, and the Albany High team hesitated and lost.

The team tied for fifth place which, according to team captain Seth Teitler, is "pretty good but not what we came for."

# COMMUNITY FOCUS

SUNNYVALE / CUPERTINO

## Sunnyvale authorizes noise study

■ **Issues:** Concerns about leaf blowers led to investigation, which is being broadened to include other sources.

BY MICHAEL CRONK  
Mercury News Staff Writer

A communitywide study on the effects of noise in Sunnyvale and whether the city's regulations and enforcement are doing the job has been authorized by the city council.

Revisiting the city's noise ordinance was identified as an issue by the council last December after concerns about excessive noise levels, particularly those generated by gas-powered leaf blowers, was raised by some residents and council members. The scope of the study was

broadened to look at other sources of noise.

At a Tuesday night public hearing, residents who spoke focused on leaf blowers as the main culprit.

"Give us a break from this racket. Sunnyvale residents despise this penetrating nuisance into our bedrooms, our nurseries, our yards, our homes, our offices, and our churches," resident Mildred Lincoln said. "Although our subject is noise, please don't overlook the dirt, pollens and filth blasted into the air by these machines."

Some proposed a ban on the blowers as has been done in other cities, while others favored stricter regulation on their operation.

The state legislature earlier this month defeated a bill that would have prevented cities from banning leaf blowers.

Two representatives from the Bay Area Gardeners Association argued against the banning of leaf blowers, saying a compromise could achieve the same results. They pointed to new and quieter garden equipment that is coming into the market and the willingness of gardeners to be more sensitive to the concerns of residents.

Council member Julia Miller said the city's existing ordinance was "extremely permissive" and proposed that the council immediately move to add more stringent regulations on the operation of leaf blowers in the city.

"This is a very important issue to our quality of life," Miller said. "I don't believe another work plan is necessary."

Miller said she had received a "mountain of mail" from residents expressing their concerns over noise and air pollution from leaf blowers.

The council said the issue needed to be studied more comprehensively. Authorization of the work plan came on a unanimous vote.

The study will include a citywide forum on the issue. Over the next several months, Sunnyvale officials will research what other cities are doing in regulating noise and how the city might modify its regulations. The options could include further restricting the days and hours of operation of all powered garden equipment.

The study is scheduled to be completed in February.

# Clock runs down for Sunnyvale leaf blowers

■ **Regulations proposed:** City is seeking strict limits on when devices can be operated.

BY MICHAEL CRONK  
Mercury News Staff Writer

The Sunnyvale City Council on Feb. 23 will consider stricter regulation of the hours and days leaf blowers can operate and the amount of noise they can make.

Sunnyvale is the latest city to take on the issue of leaf-blower noise in residential neighborhoods.

"As more residents become involved in home-based businesses, noise in residential areas will become an issue of even greater concern in the future," said Doug Spinelli, a neighborhood preservation specialist with the city.

Spinelli said that in addition to the leaf-blower proposal, the planning commission

will also forward to the council a recommendation that outdoor loudspeakers at auto dealerships in Sunnyvale, most of which adjoin residential neighborhoods, be replaced by silent paging systems.

Currently, Los Altos is the only Bay Area city that bans gas-powered leaf blowers. A ballot measure upholding a ban on leaf blowers enacted by the Menlo Park City Council was narrowly defeated in November.

Many cities regulate leaf blowers through restricting their use to certain hours and days of the week. Palo Alto has limited its volume to 75 decibels.

In Sunnyvale, the only current restriction on leaf blowers is a curfew from 10 p.m. to 7

a.m. The recommendations call for prohibiting their use before 8 a.m. weekdays and before 9 a.m. Saturdays and Sundays. Commercial use would be banned on Sundays and six holidays: New Year's, Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas.

The new regulations, if approved, would also set a maximum sound level of 65 decibels at a distance of 25 feet from the source in residential areas.

At least one resident appreciates the attention.

"Although our city would be a healthier and more desirable place to live without gasoline-powered leaf blowers, the revisions do provide some protection against the assault on our quality of life," said Jim Lincoln, 72, a retired high-tech marketing consultant.

"Currently there's no limit on the volume or duration of noise," said Lincoln. "This

would give us an extra hour of silence in the morning and, best of all, the noise would be limited."

Complaints by residents over noise intruding into their neighborhoods, particularly from leaf blowers, led last fall to a communitywide forum on noise.

Council member Julia Miller, saying the city's ordinance was "extremely permissive," took up the residents' cause. She said she's received a "mountain of mail" from residents complaining about the noise and pollutants coming from the leaf blowers.

Jane Bechtel, who runs a business from her home, said adopting and sticking to the recommended sound level for leaf blowers should help.

"I've lived here nearly 20 years and in the last three years it's gotten really bad with the leaf blowers. I'm between four homes that use the same gardening service on the

same day, and it gets very noisy," said Bechtel, who uses ear protection when the din becomes too great.

Representatives for commercial gardeners and power equipment dealers are encouraging compromise rather than an outright ban of leaf blowers.

"We've been working with gardeners in the area to use quieter leaf blowers and to use them more responsibly," said Juan Carlos Prado, executive director of the Bay Area Gardeners Association. "We also offer education and training on proper leaf blower etiquette and use of leaf blower machines."

## IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

The public hearing on proposed changes to Sunnyvale's noise ordinance is scheduled Tuesday, Feb. 23, in the council chambers at Sunnyvale City Hall, 456 W. Olive Ave. The meeting begins at 7:30 p.m.

## Leaf-blowers, barking dogs on city review

Residents of Sunnyvale can sit down with City Councilmember Julia Miller to discuss noise and leaf-blowers at a special meeting Sept. 15 in the West Conference Room at City Hall.

Miller is meeting with residents in hopes of defusing what has often become a heated political issue in several California cities.

"Hopefully, we can handle people's concerns before the public hearing and before the report to council is prepared," she added.

• **Brief**, page 8

## BRIEF

*continued from page 5*

At the Sept. 22 meeting, councilmembers will decide on the scope of a study that will review the effects of leaf-blowers and the city's possible legal response to them. The study will also examine other sources of neighborhood noise complaints such as barking dogs.

The Sept. 11 meeting will take place at 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

9-9-98

# Something in the Air

The leaf-blower apologist whose letter appeared last week (Letters, Dec. 10) is employed by the manufacturer of a "quiet" model which has reportedly failed to prove that claim in numerous tests. But noise is only a single flaw in the irresponsible use of these machines.

If the writer believes that "airborne feces and allergens" are not a significant health risk, consider this: Leaf blowers sold by Sears, Home Depot and other retailers are displayed in boxes claiming air velocity as high as 200 miles per hour.

When dog turds crumble into dust on the sidewalks and are removed by leaf blowers, we breathe that air. When pollen and other allergens are produced by vegetation, leaf blowers ensure that they will get into our lungs—along with mold spores, rodent hair, bacteria, mites and tiny insects. If you must live with asthma, emphysema, bronchitis or eye irritation, you can thank leaf blowers for contributing to your pain.

James Lincoln, Sunnyvale

# Conveniences Gone Bad

Gee, now I know what I want for Christmas—a leaf blower. Not. Talk about your domestic terrorism. These mother-loving decibel-busters reek with blustery overkill. Their annoyance factor cancels any supposed benefits their users claim they have.

Let's face it, leaf blowers exist because they create an illusion of usefulness. But the day that I can't sweep my driveway, broomwise, without having a tidy fit over the odd leftover leaf is the day I seek out serious therapy.

So why do we even listen to ballsy attorneys demanding "rights" for leaf-blower operators? Once you start with your "reasonable compromises" and/or your "accommodation of competing interests," the leaf blower as a viable tool for the New Millennium gains a permanent niche in our louder-by-the-minute lives.

Or not. Can you say monkey wrenching? Anyway, perhaps someday in the future we'll be able to view leaf blowers—along with car alarms, weed eaters, jet skis and other assorted Conveniences Gone Bad—at the Museum of Cultural Arrogance. Until then, don't blow leaf, smoke it.

Tim Rudolph, Santa Cruz

## CORRECTION

*A Simple Plan*, reviewed on page 31, is playing in San Francisco but has not yet gotten an opening date for the Santa Clara Valley.

12-2-98

# OPINION

## LETTERS

### City could solicit opinions on noise from more age groups

I have lived in the Sunnyvale area my whole life, and have always awakened and fallen asleep to the same voice: the one of the man that announces the next train that will arrive at the Sunnyvale Cal Train Station. I mean, seriously, does that speaker really need to be that loud? Probably not.

I recently attended a city forum about the noise problems that Sunnyvale has, and it seemed like all the people that were constantly complaining were 60 years old and above. Most of the discussion seemed to be about pretty petty things.

Being a high school student, it's assumed that I'm not concerned about my city. That's not true, but I felt that way listening to the problems brought up at the meeting. It seemed the worst problems were being ignored.

Leaf blowers? Aren't they in every city? We all know Sunnyvale is the best place for living in the world. But do a few morning leaf blowers make that untrue? I think the city should have asked a wider range of age groups about what they thought was loud, and what wasn't.

BOB DAVIDSON  
*Sunnyvale*

## FEUD OF THE WEEK

**JULIE ("CATWOMAN")  
NEWMAR**

**AGE: 62**

**HEIGHT: 5 ft. 10 in.**

**WEIGHT: Formerly  
39-23-39**

**OCCUPATION:  
Ex-vixen**

**BEST PUNCH:  
Formed ZAP (Zero  
Air Pollution) with  
other Los Angeles  
celebrities to stop  
people from using  
leaf blowers**

PROUSER—SIPA



D. HOLSTON—HIGH POINT ENTERPRISE/AP



**L.A. ("BRING IN DA  
NOISE") GARDENERS**

**AGE: Varies**

**HEIGHT: Varies**

**WEIGHT: Thin and  
healthy**

**OCCUPATION:  
Gardeners**

**BEST PUNCH: Adri-  
an Alvarez, leader  
of the Association  
of Latin American  
Gardeners, fights  
the proposed leaf-  
blower ban**

**THE WINNER** Gardeners—cops say they won't enforce the ban and blow them away

that reads THE SUN knows anything about these bikes (they were stolen in the Cherry Chase area off Mary Avenue) it would be appreciated if they would give a call.

BETTY CARDINALI  
*Sunnyvale*

To contact Ms. Cardinali, please call Maggie Benson at 255-7500. —Editor

## There is more to this than noise

Sunnyvale's Nov. 24 noise forum may prod our city to revise the toothless noise ordinance which allows unregulated leaf blower operation every day of the year. A city which takes pride in quality of life would not permit a noisy business—like a motorcycle shop—to operate in a residential area, yet we have no defense against the invasion of privacy by daily leaf blower assaults.

The forum began with a summary of Sunnyvale's general noise standards, which exempt leaf blowers of 60 decibels in residence yards and patios, and 45 decibels in home interiors. Anyone using a simple sound-level meter can verify that the repeated intrusion of leaf-blower noise far exceeds those reasonable specifications. Noise louder than 80 decibels is routine; the din penetrates our homes daily, even in cold weather when doors and windows are closed.

Leaf-blower apologists at the Sunnyvale forum, includ-

ing an equipment salesman who instructed the audience on the distinction between democracy and communism, advised us not to worry—they assure us that education will halt the abuses we endure.

Do leaf-blower users not already know that they invade our privacy and foul our air? Do they not know that many Sunnyvale residents work in their homes and are forced to interrupt their businesses when noise intrudes? That blowing debris into streets to be scattered by traffic is unsanitary and blocks storm drains? That holidays (especially Thanksgiving Day) and Sundays deserve respect, as do funeral services in our churches? That napping children are awakened by noise? And that adults also sleep during the day—the medical, law enforcement and fire professionals who work at night and must cope with noise while they try to rest? That wet leaves cannot be moved efficiently by leaf blowers running at full throttle when a rake would do the job in a fraction of the time? That many of our neighbors live with allergies, eye problems and serious respiratory diseases that are aggravated by filthy air?

Leaf blowers blast air at speeds up to 200 miles per hour, forcing us to inhale contaminants such as pollen, bacteria, rat hair, mold spores,

dried dog droppings, mites and tiny insects. They are also responsible for huge amounts of hydrocarbon pollution.

The claim that "education" will halt leaf-blower abuse is ridiculous. Sunnyvale has ignored this problem while cities as small as Los Altos and as large as Los Angeles have banned the use of gasoline-powered machines. Sunnyvale can retard the degradation of public health by regulating leaf-blower usage.

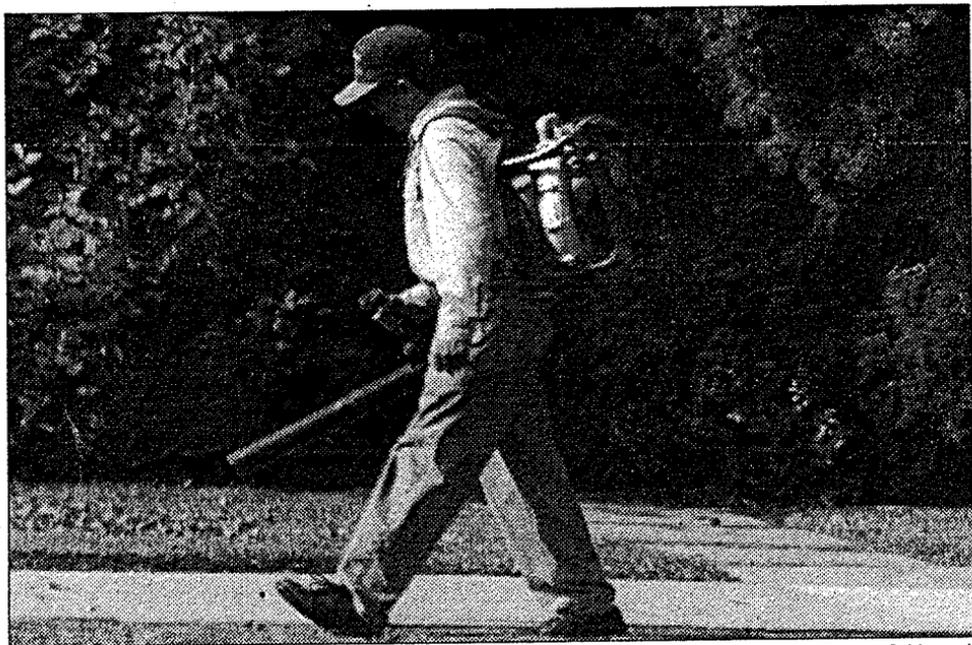
Our city staff is being lobbied by leaf-blower advocates, but residents were given little advance notice of the public forum last month. The City Council expects staff recommendations for noise ordinance revision in February and residents who want relief from this nuisance should communicate promptly with the Community Development Department, Box 3707, Sunnyvale, CA 94088; fax 730-7715.

Silence will give consent to continuing noise and filthy air if we do not ask for action now.

JAMES LINCOLN  
*Sunnyvale*

## It's not the engineer it's the company

Tony DiLeon  
plained in a let  
for that the v  
commercial  
was one  
respon  
him



Photograph by George Sakkestad

*A new law will not mean fewer leaf blowers on Sunnyvale streets, but it will mandate that they be quieter.*

## A decade of complaints yields leaf-blower law

By SAM SCOTT

The unmistakable mating call of the professional gardener should be a little less piercing from now on.

Restrictions on leaf blower noise in Sunnyvale went into effect on January 1.

"Leaf blowers have to be the new models and have to carry a manufacturer's certification that they can operate at 65 decibels or lower when measured at 50 feet," says Doug Spinelli, a Sunnyvale code enforcement officer.

Prior to the ordinance, leaf blowers could operate in Sunnyvale without noise restraints.

Fines increase for each offense. The first violation is \$25, the second \$50, and the third \$75. Homeowners could be the ones paying.

"If we are unable to catch up with the gardener, Spinelli says, "then we'll turn our attention to the property owners to bring pressure on the gardener."

So far, Spinelli says there have been no complaints, and no citations.

The new law might help a situation people have been complaining about for decades. Glenn Kurimoto, of Gardenland garden supplies, says blowers became popular in the '70s when hosing down driveways had become an unconscionable (and illegal) waste of water. Shooting air became the alternative to spraying water.

For nearly as long, people have been complaining about the resulting noise.

"I've petitioned the city for nine years to put some sort of restriction on leaf blowers," says Sunnyvale resident Jim Lincoln. "The noise is horrendous."

"I complained about them 15 years ago," Les Tremayne, a Sunnyvale resident, says. "I've been upset by leaf blowers for years and years."

Both see the new ordinance as a step in the right direction.

So, does Juan Carlos, president of the Bay Area Gardeners' Association, a group claiming to represent 200 gardening outfits on the Peninsula.

"We would much prefer these restrictions to a total ban," Carlos says. He says that the previous lack of restraint in Sunnyvale may have been too liberal.

Carlos says that noise restrictions are a good step, but more is needed to assure neighborhood peace. He is working with the city of Palo Alto to teach classes on gardening etiquette. He says he wants to do the same with Sunnyvale.

"If they're not going to be using the leaf blowers responsibly, the problem is still going to be there," Carlos says.

Dave Boesch, head of the city's community development is amenable to a city seminar on techniques.

"We'd certainly be willing and interested in doing something like that."

Carlos says the costs of changing equipment are bearable.

"It is a \$500 expense per unit, but the way we see it is as an investment."

Kurimoto, of Gardenland, says the quieter models are actually cheaper than louder models because the leaf blower industry is interested in appeasing people's concerns to protect its business.

Even if a gardener comes in asking for a older, louder model, Kurimoto says the shop's employees try to encourage him to buy a newer, quieter model.

How well the word has spread remains to be seen.

As a retiree, Lincoln hears blowers his neighbors might miss. He is not sure how effective the ban will be.

"What I see is continued use of gas powered blowers which cannot conform to the noise limit," he says. "There's no sign of any awareness on the part of the people I see every day."

12-2-98

# Residents speak out on noise issues

## Input will be added to study

By JUSTIN BERTON

Sunnyvale residents at a Nov. 24 public forum called leaf blowers loud, obnoxious and inefficient.

But few said they should be banned altogether.

More than 40 residents and city officials—including a few leaf blower political groupies from neighboring cities—participated in the forum, which is part of the city's review of its current noise ordinance.

A small but determined group of residents also attended the meeting to make city officials aware of the public address systems used by auto dealerships along El Camino Real.

Director of Community Development David Boesch said the noise abatement study, which will include a recommendation to the City Council on what to do about the high-powered gardening tools, will be completed in February.

Councilmember Julia Miller, who has taken a leadership position on the noise issue, said the forum was necessary in order to gauge public opinion about noise and the quality of life in Sunnyvale.

"Hopefully, staff took some good notes and it will help give the council solid recommendations," she said after the meeting.

• Noise, page 6

## NEWS

### Noise: Residents ask for restrictions

*Continued from page 1*

Councilmember Fred Fowler and vice mayor Pat Vorreiter also attended the forum, which was broadcast on KSUN.

Though most speakers strayed from calling for a complete ban on leaf blowers, a few residents said the tools were devastating to the quaint charm of the city, and should be removed.

"I feel like I'm going nuts," said Carol Lewis, who also works in the city. Lewis said when she is at work, oftentimes leaf blowers outside her window will force her to return home where she can work in peace. But on a few occasions, she said, she has returned home only to be inundated with more noise from leaf blowers.

"I feel like I can't sleep or function," Lewis said.

Lewis added that if a ban cannot be implemented, a time and use restriction will be needed.

The idea already has the support of at least one councilmember.

"I'm not going for a ban," Miller said. "This is a quality-of-life issue. I'm hoping my colleagues will support a restriction, particularly on the weekends."

As it stands now, leaf blowers and other powered equipment are permitted to operate in Sunnyvale between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m. daily. Many speakers at the forum called for regular working hours, with restrictions on weekends and holidays.

Jim Lincoln, a resident of 29 years and avid leaf blower opponent, said the issue is not only about noise, but health as well.

"I would like to see the dirt and the debris that gets kicked up into the air cease," he said. "And I don't see that happening without a total ban."

The issue of leaf blowers has been contested up and down the state, especially in the Bay Area.

Don Howard, who said he's been "hopping around city to city" to lobby against all-out bans, said changes in the manufacturing of leaf blowers have created quieter tools.

"In the past, the industry produced

some obnoxious machines. But now, they've changed," he said.

The forum included a brief demonstration of three types of leaf blowers. As participants sat inside the chambers, an assistant revved up the machines outside, drawing complaints from both sides.

Proponents of leaf blowers said an indoor demonstration would unfairly increase the true decibel reading, while opponents said the tools were distant, and purposely not turned to full throttle.

Boesch admitted the demonstration "didn't quite work as we had hoped."

Myra Orta, a Los Altos resident who boasted, "I'm the person who was instrumental in achieving the ban [in Los Altos]," said she hoped the ongoing debate on the issue would remain civil.

"I really hope it doesn't happen in Sunnyvale. What happened in Menlo Park, it was a disgrace. If that's going to happen here, then I feel sorry for you."

One gardener and resident of Sunnyvale said residents should remain focused on the best interests of Sunnyvale.

"This is a Sunnyvale matter," he said. "Not here or there, not anywhere but here. We should all be able to come together as our community to work along [with one another]."

Though the majority of meeting-goers spoke about leaf blowers, a small group of Sunnyvale residents asked the city to help them eliminate another form of excessive noise: the public announcement systems at the car dealerships along El Camino Real.

Residents who live near the auto dealerships said the outdoor paging systems can be heard from their homes.

The residents suggested the dealerships could use waistband pagers, such as those worn by food servers at restaurants. The pager would vibrate if an employee was needed.

Tom Foss, the general manager of Sunnyvale Toyota, said the pager system seemed like a good idea. "We would do anything to make it better," he said.



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November 24, 1998

The Honorable Julia Miller,  
Councilmember  
City of Sunnyvale  
456 W. Olive Avenue  
Sunnyvale, CA 94086

Dear Councilmember Miller:

Thank you for alerting our association to Sunnyvale's plans to consider revisions to the City Noise Ordinance that would cover leafblowers and other gardening equipment.

While it is not appropriate for us to testify tonight regarding noise pollution, I did want to remind the Council that leafblowers and small landscaping equipment can have an even more serious effect than noise: air pollution. In my letter to you of September 11, 1998, and in attached materials to that letter, I related the harmful contributions, in emissions and dust, for which they are responsible.

Since smaller, electric equipment is not only quieter, but also less polluting, I urge Sunnyvale to opt for regulating the type of equipment used and thereby get the added benefit of reducing pollution. Changing the hours of permitted use will not bring this bonus.

Please call on me if I may be of further assistance, and please do alert us if the Council considers any non-noise based regulation of landscaping equipment.

Sincerely,

Margaret Leathers Sidener, M.S.  
Executive Director

MLS:sb

cc: David S. Boesch, Jr.,  
Director of Community Development

# Citizens Unite in Demand to Turn Down the Noise

by Mieke H. Bomann

**SEATTLE (ANS)**—David Meltzer wakes up every morning to both the sweet hello of his new bride and a siren-like noise emanating from the sweeper that cleans the shopping mall parking lot near his north Seattle home.

Wesley Larson, whose 1908 house overlooks picturesque Lake Union here, cannot have a conversation in his front yard because of the freeway traffic on Interstate 5 that careens through his neighborhood with the decibel level of a smoke

*"People don't realize the impacts of noise, and they think that people who are complaining are just cranks who need to get a life. But it's not the case."*

— Eric Zwerling,  
director of the Noise Technical  
Assistance Center,  
Rutgers University

alarm.

Cathryn Vandenbrink lives in the heart of the city's entertainment district, where loud music from the bars penetrates her home most nights of the week.

Eardrums are ringing and tempers are fraying across this city that is experiencing extraordinary population growth and economic development, accom-

panied by the amplified thump, scream, drone and clunk of modern life.

In response, residents like Meltzer, Larson and Vandenbrink are forming anti-noise coalitions here and across the country and demanding that their concerns be addressed.

Efforts to seek relief from unwanted sound traditionally have drawn grimaces from police officers too busy with more heinous offenses, and smirks from offending neighbors or business owners who seem to consider their property rights inclusive of the common aural landscape.

That's changing. Outraged that noise has reached a crescendo so pitched that it is harmful physiologically, a growing number of citizens are organizing to heighten awareness about the negative consequences of noise.

"Noise has an insidious spiral," said Les Blomberg, director of the Noise Pollution Clearinghouse, a national resource center for anti-noise efforts, based in Montpelier, Vt. "It reduces our level of civility. We turn our backs on public space because we've degraded it with noise. So we have less connection with our neighbors and are more likely to noise-pollute."

Seattle residents got the ear of Seattle city council member Tina Podlodowski, who chairs the council's public safety committee. Podlodowski aide Sally Clark said, "Noise from bars, noise from boom boxes, airplanes, ice cream trucks. It's clearly impacting people. It is something the city can provide a better service on."

A task force including representatives of the police, department of land use and citizens drafted an unusual ordinance that includes interior noise standards.

The proposed ordinance would make it illegal for commercial establishments such as bars to emit more than 75 decibels of noise heard 15 feet away.

(The Environmental Protection Agency considers 70 decibels the average intensity of sound a person can hear in a 24-hour period without harmful effects.) The proposal would also set standards for noise emanating from houses and apartments.

Other cities have set noise standards but the proposals would make Seattle one of the handful of cities whose legislation stipulates use of new sound-measuring equipment. For example, octave band meters would enable police to measure the noise of low-octave sound polluters like loud deep-bass speakers, bass guitars or boom cars that may not reach high-decibel levels but that can be extremely disruptive. The Seattle legislation also authorizes police to remove sound amplification equipment if the noise persists.

The Seattle Council on Airport Affairs, a new coalition of neighborhood groups particularly concerned with nighttime noise from cargo planes, plans to lobby airport officials and pilots for a regional airport plan.

"There are a million operations a year, either takeoffs or landings, in the Puget Sound area," said Mike Rees, president of the group. "The sky is full of aluminum these days. We need a regional solution to this."

Shifting flight paths to less populated areas, airplane noise standards and a ban on all late-night cargo flights would go a long way toward easing noise disturbances in high-density population regions, Rees said.

Some airports, including San Diego's, have banned late-night and early-morning takeoffs of cargo planes which tend to be older and noisier. On the ground, California has spent millions of dollars erecting sound walls along its freeways to dampen car and truck noise.

Other cities are putting police on the noise beat. Particularly high on the law enforcement agenda is the boom of superam-

plified car stereos. In Rochester, N.Y., a new law allows police to tow a car that's blasting music plainly audible 50 feet away at night and 100 feet during the day.

Yet not all noise abatement is equally desirable in the eyes of law enforcement and other authorities. Police, firefighters and train engineers have often said the safety benefits of loud sirens and whistles outweigh the irritant they represent to people in the middle of the night.

On the property-rights front, owners of jet skis stress their right to enjoy themselves; landscapers underscore the importance of leaf blowers to their jobs. The trade organization for companies that produce jet skis has invoked the public's right to leisure in responding to complaints by anti-noise groups.

For their part, anti-noise groups say that raising awareness about the harmful effects of noise is essential to their goal of quieter neighborhoods.

"People don't realize the impacts of noise, and they think that people who are complaining are just cranks who need to get a life. But it's not the case," said Eric Zwerling, director of the Rutgers Noise Technical Assistance Center at Rutgers University in New Jersey.

One of the centers originally contracted by federal Office of Noise Abatement and Control in the 1970s, the Rutgers office now operates independently as a noise training and resource center. During the Reagan administration, the noise office was shut down and the mantle of regulation handed to local government.

Blomberg of the Noise Pollution Clearinghouse says technology can solve some mechanical issues like softer backup beepers on trucks, and mufflers on motorcycles. But there is no substitute for civility, which he and others agree is key to turning down the noise.

"The first thing is politeness and civility," said Blomberg.

## Noise Hurts

- Exposure to loud noise is one of the leading causes of hearing loss among the 28 million Americans with impaired hearing.
- Loud noise disrupts the cardiovascular system and results in elevated blood pressure and a faster heart beat. In fact, noise is such a reliable elevator of stress in humans that it is used in tests of stress drugs.
- Noise impedes learning among school children.
- Expectant mothers have been warned by doctors of the potential negative impacts of noise on the fetus.

"Noise is a waste product. It's second-hand sound, and we're dumping it on our neighbors. Good neighbors keep their noise to themselves. We need to take back our neighborhoods." ■

**Details:** Les Blomberg, 888-200-8332 or <[www.nonoise.org](http://www.nonoise.org)>; Sally Clark, 206-684-8808; Mike Rees, 206-282-1109; Eric Zwerling, 732-932-8065 or <<http://snowfall.envsci.rutgers.edu/estc/rntac/>>.

Mieke H. Bomann is a freelance reporter based in Seattle. © 1998 The American News Service.

## Leaf blowers pollute

I must wholeheartedly disagree with Elmer L. Hulberg ("We can live with leaf blowers," Letters, Oct. 12). The main problem with leaf blowers is not the noise but the pollution. "Leaf blowing" appears to be the method of moving decaying organic material and dirt into other yards, into streets, and into the atmosphere. While riding a bicycle, I was once temporarily blinded by waste being blown into El Camino Real.

It is time to end the use of two-cycle, gas-wasting, loud leaf blowers. It would be different if these machines could suck the decaying material from the yards instead of blowing waste into the air, clothing, and eyes.

— Stephen J. Holly  
Palo Alto

## Racism claim is false

THE claim by some that Menlo Park's ban on gasoline-powered leaf blowers is racist is false and, worse, counterproductive to combating racism against Latinos.

Supporters of the ban are motivated, not by racism, but by well-documented harm done by gas blowers. Both the Sierra Club and the American Lung Association endorse Measure E, Menlo Park's gas blower ban referendum.

In contrast, no income loss by gardeners has been reported in the 23 California communities that have banned these devices, and there are alternatives to gas blowers. False charges of racism persist, however, apparently due to efforts of gas blower manufacturers to influence state and local regulation of these devices.

Campaigning to place this referendum on the ballot, ban opponents alleged it was needed to achieve the wishes of local citizens. Local control was forgotten, however, when ban opponents cynically breached legislative protocol in failed attempts to pass a state law barring cities from banning gas blowers.

When people make irresponsible charges of racism, real and significant racial issues we face (such as Propositions 187 and 209) become trivialized in the public's mind. When false claims arise, more minds close to the fact that actual racism still exists and must be fought.

Measure E should be approved on its merits, not dismissed due to bogus claims.

— Daniel S. Gonzales  
Los Altos Hills

## In defense of Campbell

(Letters, Oct. 23) rebukes  
in Campbell for vot-

# S

## Cut the noise in Sunnyvale

I was pleased to learn that the city of Sunnyvale is looking into the issue of noise (Page 6B, Oct. 1). During the past year, I've become acutely aware of just how noisy it is at and around my apartment complex. Each morning at about 7 a.m., the piercing beeps from construction trucks begin, followed by leaf blowers or power-generated sweepers. It is nerve-racking, to say the least.

I used to work a few days at home during the week or go home for lunch now and then — but no more. Being "at home" during the day is unbearable. If I should get sick, I'll consider checking into a hotel.

I encourage all residents to speak up on this issue and reinstate the good old broom. As for the construction trucks and their endless beeping, is there something that can be done? I'm going insane.

— Cara Lewis  
Sunnyvale

## We can live with leaf blowers

I support our gardeners and their leaf blowers. We all should be able to endure 15 or 30 minutes of leaf-blowing. This enables the gardeners to do a better job in less time.

If they are going to be forced to use a rake and broom, gardening prices will go sky high. As for pollution, go after the big polluters, the diesel trucks.

— Elmer L. Hulberg  
Sunnyvale

## Have your say

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