

To: Los Altos Environmental Commission  
From : GreenTown Los Altos Clean Air Advocates  
Date: August 8, 2022

### **Who We Are**

We are GreenTown Los Altos volunteers who formed a group in January 2019 to address the issue of gas leaf blowers in our community. The ordinance prohibiting gas leaf blowers was added to the Los Altos Municipal Code in 1991 and yet they continue to be in use throughout the City. (Municipal Code 6.16.070 – Prohibited Acts Section B.15).

### **What We Have Accomplished**

We launched a public education campaign which is continuing.

- We created handouts for homeowners and notices for landscape workers which inform them of the gas leaf blower prohibition and fines for citations and which educate about the environmental effects and health hazards of gas leaf blowers. Volunteers have distributed over 800 of these flyers.

(See them and other resources on the GreenTown website: [greentownlosaltos.org/gas-leaf-blowers](https://greentownlosaltos.org/gas-leaf-blowers).)

-Members of our group authored articles, letters-to-the editor, and opinion pieces in the Town Crier and the monthly GreenTown newsletter. Also, we have been active in conversations on Nextdoor.

-We applied for a \$25,000 grant from Bay Area Air Quality Management District for a gas/electric leaf blower exchange, but did not receive the grant.

-We met several times with Los Altos Police Code Enforcement, hired in March 2019, and with other officers and Chief of Police Galea.

-We partnered with Los Altos Hardware for an electric leaf blower promotion.

### **Where We Are Now**

Complaint calls received by Los Altos Police concerning gas leaf blower violations:

2019: 403

2020: 478

2021: 384

Number of gas leaf blower citations issued:

2018: 12

2019: 40 (the first year of our Clean Air Advocate activities)

2020: 13

2021: 7

## **Why We Need to Curtail the Use of Gas Leaf Blowers**

The use of gas leaf blowers adversely impacts community health and welfare.

Gas leaf blowers generate high noise levels which disrupt neighborhood tranquility, disturb residents, workers, and visitors, and thereby degrade the quality of life in Los Altos.

Gas leaf blowers generate significant amounts of toxic emissions which contribute to air pollution, thereby intensifying climate change.

The use of gas leaf blowers increases the volume of particulate matter in the air and thereby exacerbates allergies and respiratory ailments.

Despite the Los Altos Municipal Code Ordinance prohibiting gas leaf blowers and our years of public education, the use of gas leaf blowers has persisted to the community's detriment.

## **How to Curtail the Use of Gas Leaf Blowers**

The persistence of this unlawful activity necessitates the adoption of more stringent measures, including holding business and property owners responsible for the illegal use of leaf blowers on their property.

In Los Altos, the operator of the blower receives the citation. We have researched gas leaf blower prohibitions in other cities and learned that when the homeowner is fined for a violation, enforcement is more effective. Some of the other cities that fine the property owner are Palo Alto, Cupertino, Saratoga, Menlo Park (in study session), Santa Monica, Laguna Beach, Redondo Beach.

We urge the Environmental Commission to support the efforts of the GreenTown Los Altos Clean Air Advocates by signing the attached statement.

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### *Proposed Statement*

The Environmental Commission recognizes that gas leaf blowers contribute significantly to air pollution. The 2022 Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) designates the phase-out of off-road fossil fuel engines as a Priority Action in (1.6A). Seventy percent of respondents to a CAAP Task Force survey ranked air and air quality as “most important” to Los Altos quality of life.

In 1991, Los Altos was the first city in the Bay Area to ban gas leaf blowers. But a 10-minute walk or ride through Los Altos will confirm that the illegal use of gas leaf blowers is still prevalent in our community. Police rarely issue citations (40 in 2019, 13 in 2020, 7 in 2021), even though they witness violations on a daily basis.

In order to protect the health of our community, the Environmental Commission requests the enforcement of the Municipal Code ordinance that prohibits gas leaf blowers in Los Altos. As demonstrated in other cities such as Palo Alto, Cupertino, Saratoga, Santa Monica, Laguna Beach, Redondo Beach and soon Menlo Park, enforcement will be much easier if the ordinance is modified to hold the property owners as well as the operators responsible for the illegal use of gas-powered leaf blowers in Los Altos.