



Will the Controversy Blow Over?

The controversy swirling around gas-powered leaf blowers has become a hot topic in the landscape industry of late, as stringent restrictions of their use have recently gone into effect in Los Angeles. Many are wondering where the legislation will end.

Robin Pendergrast of International Marketing Exchange, which represents Echo, Inc., has been speaking out against the movement to ban the devices. He recently spoke to our editorial staff about the issue, as its effects quickly spread across the country.

A complaint filed in the Superior Court of California by residents of Los Angeles, "who share a common interest in the elimination of all leaf blowers," cited the air and water pollution caused by the devices, as well as the "disruptive" noise they produce. Celebrities such as TV's original Catwoman, Julie Newmar, and *Family Ties* mom, Meredith Baxter, rallied to rid their neighborhoods of the machines.

The courts responded by banning the use of gas-powered blowers within 500 feet of residences. This action drew immediate fire from opponents of the ban. They claim that the movement is politically motivated, and some are even calling it racist.

Peter Gumbel of the *Wall Street Journal* reports that "tending the lawns of affluent Angelenos was once the domain of Japanese-Americans. But it has increasingly become an entry-level job for Latino immigrants, many of whom, it turns out, are a lot more political." The ban poses a major threat to these jobs, since it dramatically increases the time needed to complete each assignment.

A study conducted by the City of Whittier, Calif. in 1992, showed that the same task that would take a backpack blower 2-1/2 hours and approximately \$35 to complete, would require 282 labor hours and more than \$4,000 in labor costs if done with a broom. In an interview with *newtimesla.com*, landscape laborer Javier Salazar explains, "The blowers make my work easier. If I didn't have one, I'd be cleaning about six homes a day. That wouldn't be enough. I'd have to get another job to be able to feed my family."

The controversy is not confined to the city of Los Angeles, either. Similar legislation has already taken effect in parts of New York and in other counties in California. Here in the Midwest, the City of Evanston banned the use of blowers between May 15 and October 1. This has created a headache for the groundscrew at Northwestern University, who have to work around the ordinance to prepare for two football games in September.

If this issue does not already affect your ability to perform your job as a sports turf manager effectively, the controversy may be closer to your community than you think. Like the groundscrew at N.U., you may be stripped of a piece of equipment that you take for granted until it's gone.

All this leaves me wondering which noisy power tool will be the next to incur the wrath of angry residents. Before long we may be pulling the old manual push clippers out of the attic.

Steve Berens, Editor

TIP O' THE MONTH

Gypsum Supplies Calcium

In last month's Q&A, Dave Minner told readers when gypsum applications are not helpful to soil. In the following, he takes us through applications that will help your turf. See sportsTURF March 1998 for more details.

Application of gypsum in the following situations increases plant calcium and improves turf growth:

- When a soil's pH is above 6.7 and calcium (Ca) is deficient, gypsum (CaCO_3) should be used to supply Ca instead of lime. Lime applied to an already high pH further increases pH, and may lead to iron deficiency.

Gypsum supplies Ca without increasing pH. A suggested target range for Ca in a turf plant is 0.4 to 1.2%.

- Water supplies are often high in sodium (Na^+). Sand based systems irrigated with high Na^+ water may have excessive Na^+ on the exchange complex. Since sands do not deflocculate, the high Na^+ will not result in reduced drainage.

Sands retain macroporosity through particle size arrangement rather than by aggregation of particles. The high Na^+ irrigation water can easily displace Ca^{++} , and can make it deficient in sandy soils with low cation exchange capacity.

Gypsum can be used in this case as a source of Ca^{++} . Testing both soil and plants associated with sand based sports turf has revealed that apparently adequate levels of Ca^{++} in the rootzone have produced apparently deficient levels of Ca^{++} in the plant. □

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