

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: power blowers

By Robin Pendergrast

The power blower (or leaf blower as it is commonly called today) was initially introduced as a modified dusting and misting mechanism in the mid-1970s. It wasn't long after that the use was enhanced to use a zephyr of air as an ingenious new maintenance tool that could be used to clean in a variety of applications.

Commercial landscapers and municipalities have evolved into universally using power blowers/leaf blowers for clean-up activities. The general adaptation and the multiplicity of applications took off in the mid-1980s; this included cleaning tennis courts, gutters and roofs to larger applications like cleaning athletic facilities.

The technology of dedicated power blowers took place in a time when both backpack and hand-held configurations seemed to be a much more economical and ergonomically practical way to get jobs in the field finished quicker and easier. Along the way, while athletic facilities throughout the world have capitalized on this air-moving technology, there have been challenges based on the oftentimes erroneous information that was provided relative to the process of moving debris with a power blower and periodic noise implications.

But in most cases, the true problems that were initially associated with leaf blowers were primarily the result of inappropriate use, selfishness, and the lack of general common sense of their applications by users.

For example, in the early 1990s there was a challenge to the continued use of leaf blowers in the Rose Bowl by the local municipality (Pasadena, CA). Fortunately after a presentation of the dramatic cost savings that resulted from the use of leaf blowers to clean out this 92,500-seat arena, the arrival of new technology and some common sense prevailed.

Similar challenging situations have been repeated again and again in cities throughout the country and in parts of the world. Fortunately



the evolution of new technology for dramatically quieter leaf blowers provides substantially cleaner engine emissions. This has paved the way for a few manufacturers to create an active benchmark of optimum performance. The industry added new technology that caters to and supports sports and athletic arena applications.

Today, almost 20 years later, the power blower has found a practical and active home particularly in larger sports complexes and athletic arenas. The productivity associated with the product, as opposed to attempting to use rakes and brooms, in athletic arenas just doesn't meet high standards anymore. When there are four or five people that can accomplish the same task of 50-60 people there is no reasonable explanation as to why the product shouldn't be used.

The new engine technology that has been introduced in recent years provides a substantially quieter power blower/leaf blower overall and a two-cycle engine specifically that supports a clean-emissions

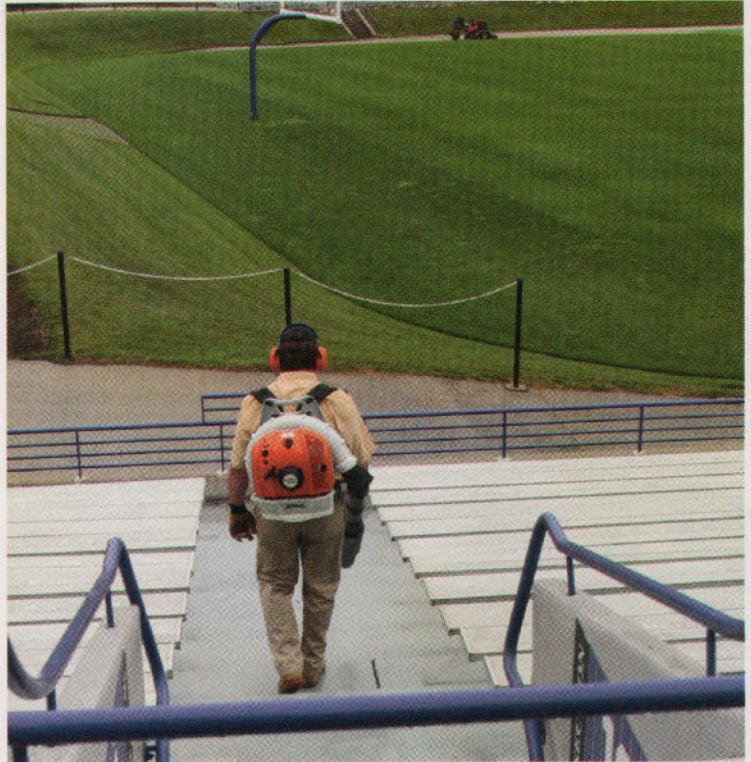


environment. The result has been an even stronger acceptance across the board of the product in football and soccer stadiums and anyplace where debris, leaves or mounds of paper need to be moved quickly, efficiently and safely.

The new, clean and quieter technology cannot stand alone; safety should be emphasized as well. Ear protection, eye protection and safety apparel are essential when individuals use leaf blowers, whether it is for short or long duration. Common sense should be applied and become a benchmark for all facility managers and users.


It is just too practical and too simple not to use the leaf blower given the multiplicity of clean-up activities there are in the athletic arena environment.


Robin Pendergrast is a writer, photographer and video producer. See <http://www.rfpphoto.com>. ■



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