

Transitioning Toward Green Lawn Care Equipment

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Gas powered lawn care equipment has many negative impacts. California's American Green Zone Alliance and Massachusetts' Quiet Communities are two organizations that have been studying these impacts, and they have found that they are extensive. Firstly, gas powered lawn equipment contributes heavily to air pollution. Operating a gas powered lawnmower for one hour can produce as much smog forming hydrocarbons as driving the average car between 100 and 200 miles. In addition, the need for gas and oil to operate these machines continues to add to our reliance on unsustainable forms of energy. It is estimated that lawn mowers use about 1.2 billion gallons of gasoline a year. And along with using oil and gasoline, comes the problem of waste. Too often regulations of safe disposal of oil and chemical waste are not followed leading to contamination of land and water, and sometimes the very green spaces that are the focus of lawncare. The negative impacts of gas dependent lawn equipment are not only harmful to the environment, but also to human health. The noise pollution created by these tools is harmful to the surrounding populations, and particularly harmful to the operators of the equipment. The gas emissions from these machines also negatively impacts lung health in multiple ways: from immediately breathing in fumes to the fact it adds to the larger scale air pollution problem.

In order to remedy this problem a transition needs to be made to battery-operated machinery or hand tools like rakes and clippers. Battery-operated lawn care equipment is cleaner and quieter, and in the long term saves money, due to eliminating the need to purchase and manage gasoline. The change can be effected in

many different sectors: the residential, the commercial, the academic and the municipal. The American Green Zone Alliance has created a certification process for “green zones” for all four of these sectors. A green zone is a zero-emission and low-noise space. Battery operated equipment is cheaper for residential than commercial-grade because it does not need to be as powerful. Spreading information to suburban areas about the benefits of switching away from gas powered equipment is important for the quality of life and health in those areas, and also for the employees of lawncare companies. Universities are also a large user of gas powered lawn equipment due to their large areas of campus and athletic green spaces. Students can make proposals to private universities about making the transition to cleaner lawn care routines. Universities that make sustainability a priority tend to draw more interest to their institution.

State- and city-sponsored transitions to green lawn care equipment are particularly important. By becoming an example of how to effectively make this change and to highlight benefits of this switch, governments can inspire the commercial sector to follow suit. In enacting a municipal plan for a green zone, or simply in aiding a transition to green lawn care products, it is not necessarily a good idea to just go out and buy replacement electrical equipment, as there are important differences in the technology from conventional gas-powered. A purchasing program should require that certain criteria be met. The machinery that will be bought by either town or state needs to be vetted for things like battery life, warranties, manufacturer take-back recycling programs, and the voltage/power of the equipment. It is in the best

interest of the town to bring in suppliers prior to purchase to make a proposal that is tailored to the specific requirements of the sites in question. By having the supplier evaluate the property and the needs of the buyer, the most cost-efficient and beneficial products will be acquired. This should also be paired with a training and certification process. Maintaining the batteries so that there is sufficient charge to do the work requires a little preparation. Training will ensure that the new products are used in the most efficient way and that these safer and greener practices will be just as effective at producing quality results. The municipality in question will then be aiding its community in making green jobs and helping to educate its workers in a more sustainable enterprise.