

**Regulating Gas Powered Small Engine Equipment  
Discussion with Toronto Residents  
Monday, November 23, 2009  
6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.  
Location: Leaside Memorial Community Gardens – Banquet Hall  
1073 Millwood Road**

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**SUMMARY NOTES**

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**Introduction/Background**

Lawson Oates, Director of the Toronto Environment Office, invites Toronto residents and members of the landscaping community to share their thoughts on potential measures, including regulatory options, to help reduce the harmful greenhouse gas emissions and smog-causing pollutants caused by small engine equipment, i.e. leaf blowers, chainsaws, lawnmowers, trimmers and concrete saws.

On November 23, 2009 a discussion with Toronto Residents was held. The agenda included:

- Presentation by Mike Mulqueen, Sr. Environmental Planner, Toronto Environment Office
- Questions & Answers Period
- Facilitated Small Group Discussions

**Welcoming Remarks**

Cheryl Dow, Public Consultation Unit welcomed participants to the discussion Toronto Residents and introduced the presenter Mike Mulqueen, Toronto Environment Office.

**Presentation**

Mike Mulqueen, Toronto Environment Office delivered a presentation on the Small Engine Equipment Greening Strategy. The PowerPoint presentation is available on the City's Get Involved website at <http://www.toronto.ca/involved/projects/2strokes/index.htm>

**Question and Answer Period**

***Comment:** Congratulations to the City of Toronto for taking the lead on this. For the City to take a lead in replacing its own equipment is a huge step. The information from the City's experience of replacing their own equipment is going to be very useful to the trade.*

***Comment:** My neighbour and I tried to persuade our neighbours to stop using gas powered mowing equipment and to stop using lawn services that relied on gas powered equipment. We sent out a flyer with facts and figures to everyone in our neighbourhood, about 3,000 homes and we investigated the lawn care services who were offering services without relying on gas powered equipment and offered to advertise their services for free in our neighbourhood. And we put out a call to existing lawncare providers to make a switch to more environmentally responsible equipment, particularly at the time the best alternative was electric. The use of gas blowers has probably tripled compared to two years ago when we started the campaign. We are getting a lot of*

*resistance from lawn care companies who say if I make the switch no one else will, why should I and who is going to pay? So any kind of persuasive tactics, regulations, and rules have to be fair but they also have to be understood by homeowners and lawn care companies and they have to apply to everyone.*

**Comment:** *I don't think that voluntary is going to work. When you consider that lots are only 30 feet apart and you have a gardener that serves the two yards beside you plus the two yards in the back you are inundated with gasoline pretty well four to five hours a day. Once a week and the air in your house if you have your windows open is un-breathable. The reason a gardener gave me as to why he uses gas, was because the client is paying for the electricity. He has to plug it into his client's home, he said it is more expensive that way.*

**Comment:** *Lawn care service often takes place when the client is not home. There are a lot of homeowners who actually have no idea and they probably never intend to do harm to the environment but they are unaware of what is going on, on their property.*

**Comment:** *The lawn care people are breathing this air and they are the people that are suffering, so there really is a worker safety issue. There hasn't been enough education.*

**Comment:** *There is no doubt that if we are thinking about emissions causing problems with people's health we have an issue that we should discuss. There is a lot of doubt if we get sidetracked and driven by fear of climate change.*

**Reply:** We are not here to debate Climate Change. The Climate Change, Clean Air and Sustainable energy action plan was unanimously adopted by City Council.

**Comment:** *A good point to focus on is air quality for everyone, but particularly for asthmatics and children. This focus could be more compelling for lawn care companies.*

**Question:** *Are Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PF&R) staff satisfied with the various replacements for two stroke engines or have they had to abandon certain landscaping practices altogether?*

**Answer:** The public has certain expectations for the service levels of their parks. The Toronto Environment Office worked with the PF&R Division in order to understand their service level requirements and how this could be balanced with the community and Council's desires to reduce emissions. We had a landscaping consultant looking into alternative practices and initiatives of the City already underway such as an integrated pest management program and naturalization policies. We are not at the point where we can naturalize all the parks as we still need space for recreation but City staff continue to explore opportunities, where appropriate.

**Comment:** *The City should ban two stroke engines.*

**Response:** Small engine equipment in North America is not regulated according to whether it is a two stroke engine, four stroke engine, etc. it is regulated according to the emissions. So the challenge is to recognize that the definition of a two stroke engine is not entirely useful moving forward. It is more of the emissions that are coming from the equipment. When the City retained the consultant we asked them to identify the equipment that produced the most level of emissions so that we could deal with the most polluting equipment and replace it with the best modern alternative.

**Question:** *Could the City consider including stone cutting equipment on the list of Small Engine Equipment? This equipment creates a lot of harmful dust.*

**Answer:** Various saws and equipment used for stone and concrete work were included in the strategy. We are dealing with all small engine class outdoor power equipment.

**Comment:** *Regulations for stone cutting equipment could make a tremendous impact on our lifestyle simply by freeing us from dust. If you have one of those sites very close to your home that is far more pollution from that than anything else I have experienced in my life.*

**Comment:** *Pointing to two areas where some kind of intervention is quite possible and acceptable to the trades:*

- 1. Tie the equipment to standards. Standard should be North America wide (e.g. EPA phase two 2007 equipment manufacture standard). Companies will not abide by municipal requirements unless those are based on and reflect all the accepted federal and national requirements. All pieces of small engine equipment include a label that identifies the model and decibel level (note: level should not exceed 65 decibels).*
- 2. Certification, licensing or certificate scheme: Lawncare companies are not governed by any sort of certification, licencing process, training requirements or membership in any kind of association. Unless companies are required to be reached, you will not be able to reach the companies that are not getting education and training. Currently anyone can purchase small engine equipment and start using it.*

**Comment:** *Enforcement is a concern which is why I favour an outright ban.*

**Comment:** *I think that the homeowners should be treated the same. It would be helpful to continue the incentive programs both for homeowners and for the industry. Training and financial incentives should have a timeline for implementation. Success depends on getting information out that is helpful and easily understood in many different languages.*

**Comment:** *If a certification process is put in place for anyone who is operating these machines for a profit that is how you get them to show that the equipment they are using meets the standards that are set in place. I would be in favour of a certification process that is acceptable to the landscape trade. And they should write it so that it is fair.*

**Comment:** *I think landscape companies want to do what is required and to do the right thing but what they don't want is the company they are competing against not doing it. If everyone was required to be certified and follow the same rules that would be o.k. Maybe the next step is to ask homeowners to make sure that the person is certified, and if they don't show certification then the homeowner is liable.*

**Question:** *Snowblowers are the biggest offenders, but I don't see how I can live without them.*

**A:** Snowblowers are included in the discussion and we want to find the best option to deal with them and balance competing needs.