

Address to Infrastructure and Environment Committee Members (IEC)- June 28, 2023 by Dundee Staunton, on behalf of Gasbusters

Reference: Agenda Item 2023.5.1- Two-Stroke Engine Small Equipment- Steps to Pursue a Ban

Madam Chair and Honoured Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Dundee Staunton and I represent Gasbusters, a citizens' group of more than 600 residents in Toronto, and supported by 19 residents' associations. Our mission is to achieve a ban on gas-powered leaf blowers and related garden equipment, much of which is powered by two-stroke engines.

Of the options before you, we urge you to select Option B which would begin the process to ban two-stroke engine small equipment.

I will concentrate on two points today:

1. The personal safety and environmental hazards from the fumes generated by two-stroke engine small equipment; and
2. That a ban on it is consistent with the aims of TransformTO Net Zero Strategy, and that it will seize "low hanging fruit" in that pursuit.

A two-stroke engine burns gasoline and emits as much as 30% of its fuel in its exhaust. All gasoline in Canada contains the carcinogen Benzene. Engineers have calculated that a gas leaf blower operator may be exposed to up to 15 times the Occupational Health and Safety Act short-term exposure limit regulated for all work places in Ontario where Benzene is used. It is shameful that the City allows practices that would not be permitted in industry.

More than two hundred municipalities and government institutions across North America have banned gas leaf blowers and related garden equipment. At home, our Toronto District School Board, in its Climate Change Action Report of December, 2022, declared its intention to transition from gas to electric power in its property maintenance operations. It reached this conclusion in cooperation with its union on the basis of its importance to the health and safety of its members.

Rather than looking at the cumulative effect of two-stroke equipment, Staff and this Committee need to appreciate and eliminate the event-related exposures caused by it.

This leads to my second point:

2. A ban on two-stroke engines is consistent with Toronto's TransformTO Net Zero Strategy, but this equipment is overlooked in the Strategy initiatives. The recent staff report, rather than deeming two-stroke equipment to be inconsequential to our carbon reduction goals, should observe that a ban on such machines would grasp "low-hanging fruit" in the pursuit of our climate change mitigation efforts. Why low-hanging? Because, viable alternatives are readily available on the market.

Electric technology, both wired and cordless, has advanced steadily. Last summer, I en-

countered on Yonge Street a contractor who was clearing debris from a public walkway with a battery-powered electric leaf blower. When asked, he readily declared his satisfaction with the versatility and effectiveness of his electric equipment.

And why a ban as opposed to public education? Because people are generally disinclined to change from what has become habitual for them, and it takes government to step in and provide leadership. Look as an example at the impact of the seat belt law in Ontario which mandated usage, against protest, and saved thousands of lives.

We don't have time to resist steps to arrest climate change. In a city that declared a climate emergency four years ago, any inclination to defer action of the kind that we're discussing only makes necessary more urgent action in the future, and with a lower probability of success.

It is evident from City staff's introductory remarks that they are looking to Council for guidance on the issue of a ban. I quote: "...City Council may decide to take a precautionary approach with respect to these climate, health and noise factors and enact a ban regardless. Generally speaking, City Council has the authority to ban the use of two-stroke engine small equipment depending on the nature, scope, adoption, and implementation of the measure."

Our message to members of this Committee is to act as champions of personal health and safety and the environment, and to recommend to Council a ban of all two-stroke engine-small equipment.

Thank you.