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First of July ban on gas leaf blowers powering e-device education push

By David Scholz



Dorothy Walker uses a handheld e-leaf blower to clear leaves on the road across from her Lafayette home. She checked out the device from the City's Parks and Recreation Department through its leaf blower loaner program that is available to citizens to try out handheld and backpack e-devices. Photo David Scholz

through the program, a rake has long been her tool of choice with four large oaks in her backyard.

"These blowers are easy to use and the battery is easy to install after charging. Initially I had trouble disengaging the battery from the charger, but after I pushed the right button hard enough it was no problem," said Walker, who has since checked out the handheld unit several times.

"I want to thank Sustainable Lafayette for making the blowers available to the community," she said.

While noting little likelihood of a purchase, especially if she can just keep checking out a handheld device from the city, Walker acknowledged the clear benefits it affords to make easy work of blowing leaves for her composting.

But, considering the small size of her lot, that factor outweighs such an acquisition. What a person wants to use an e-leaf blower for and the size of their property are factors Walker said make each purchase very unique.

The general feedback received by Warshaw's staff about the e-leaf blowers has been favorable. While some residents have voiced concerns over battery life to adequately do the job compared to gas-powered, and that the handheld is a little too small for a big property, others who share a landscape crew for their residences have been proactive and have already begun adapting, including having batteries kept on chargers. Crews themselves are also bringing more chargers to job sites in anticipation of the need.

Right now, Warshaw does not foresee the loaner program sunseting any time soon; there will continue to be an opportunity for residents like Walker to continue checking out the devices.

Community outcry was the impetus for moving forward with the ban in the first place a few years back.

"Many Lafayette residents during the Covid years were working from home and they were complaining that the leaf blowers (they were hearing) were extremely noisy," said Lafayette Vice Mayor Wei-Tai Kwok.

So the matter was handed to the city's Environmental Task Force to pursue. The panel did extensive research into the transition from gas-powered leaf blowers and what have been the best practices, including going to nearby Piedmont to check out its equipment.

Kwok noted this is not a new issue in some regions of California, including Los Angeles in Southern California, to transition away from gas-powered leaf blowers. But Lafayette does represent the first city in Contra Costa County to move forward with a ban.

Because it is the residents who will be subject to fines, the vice mayor said it will behoove them to educate their landscapers and gardeners that the gas-powered equipment will not be permitted effective July one.

"Like any code enforcement, we are leading with education, and we hope the community will come along," said Kwok. "Most people will."

As residents prepare for the looming July 1 ban on gas powered leaf blowers in the City of Lafayette, an increasing number have been readying for the change by taking out electric models for test drives around their residences.

Among them is Dorothy Walker, who recently checked out the handheld e-leaf blower to gauge its effectiveness around her yard as well as for clearing street in front of her of Yorkshire Court residence.

Recreation Manager John Warshaw, with the city's Parks and Recreation Department, noted there's been an uptick interest in the leaf blower loaner program, which allows for a two-week check out period, since it was initiated last October to help residents transition to the new city law regulating leaf blowers in the community.

As of the close of mid June, Warshaw noted there has been 25 applications tallied for borrowing four handheld e-leaf blowers, while the one available backpack leaf blower, mostly being checked out by residents for their hired landscape crews to try out, has had 20 applications.

Before Walker started signing out e-handheld leaf blowers

But after a couple of times being warned, Kwok acknowledged there will come a point when a ticket will be issued for repeated transgressions. The city will enforce this regulation on a complaint-driven basis. To report a violation, visit www.lovelafayette.org/city-hall/city-departments/code-enforcement/code-enforcement-request-form.

Scofflaws are subject to standard administrative citations that start at \$100 for the first violation and will increase to \$200 for a second violation. Each additional violation within a year can see the individual fines go to \$500, and potentially climb as high as \$1,000 for each subsequent offense.

The municipal code includes some discretion for the code enforcement officer to impose an administrative penalty in some lesser amounts. Those factors include: frequency, reoccurrence and number of violations; the duration of and seriousness of the violation; good faith efforts of the violator to come in compliance; financial impact on the individual; and the impact of the violation on the community.

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