

Gas-Powered Blowers Shatter Neighborhood Peace

Ansley Park, with its lovely homes, wide curving streets, mature shade trees, and extensive sidewalks, is a walker's paradise, or at least it should be. Going for a walk in our neighborhood is taking a risk that as you round a corner, your ears and lungs may be assaulted by noise and air pollution produced by gas-powered lawn maintenance machines in our yards and parks. Walking has been shown to have many health benefits, but repeated exposure to noise and air pollution is known to increase the risk of hearing loss, lung disease, high blood pressure, heart disease, and strokes.

Although mowers and trimmers are noisy, gas leaf blowers are the biggest offenders. Most use two-stroke engines, which may produce noise above 100 decibels at fifty feet away. If two or three blowers are being used at once, which is not unusual, the noise is even louder. Repeated exposure to sound levels above 85 decibels is known to cause permanent hearing loss. Leaf blower operators usually wear hearing protection, but the average neighborhood walker is exposed to the full force of these injurious sounds, often several times during each walk. Manufacturers recommend that gas blowers not be used within 50 feet of persons without hearing protection, not be operated at full power in residential areas, and that no more than one be used at one site at a time. These guidelines are widely ignored.

The level of air pollutants emitted by a single gas-powered leaf blower with a two-stroke engine is hundreds of times higher than that produced by a car or pickup truck. The localized air pollution produced by a single gas-powered leaf blower is the equivalent of a cluster of 20 pickup trucks revving their engines. Electric leaf blowers do not produce any harmful exhaust and contribute less to climate change.

More than 200 cities in 36 states have restricted the use of gas leaf blowers. In some cities they have been banned for decades. California recently passed a bill that will greatly reduce or eliminate the use of gas leaf blowers and other polluting gas-powered tools. Atlanta and Georgia are not at the forefront of this movement.

If you are concerned about neighborhood noise, air pollution, and the climate effects of gas-powered lawn equipment, here are some things you can do to lessen the problem:

1) If you have a lawn service that uses gas blowers, consider changing to a company that has already switched to battery-powered electric tools. There are now a number of such companies in Atlanta, and a partial list is available on the QuietGa.com website. Alternatively, consider purchasing your own battery-powered electric blower and asking your service to use it when they come to

your home. (Most of the expense of commercial electric blowers is in the large battery pack made to last all day. A home version costs much less.)

2) If you are signed up for weekly lawn care, switch to every two weeks. Some companies insist on selling weekly maintenance plans, but they aren't necessary for a healthy lawn. This simple change instantly reduces lawn-related noise and pollution by half.

When you take one of the above steps toward reducing noise and air pollution please let people know! Tell your neighbors what you did and why. Let the new normal become "Ansley Park—quiet streets, clean air, truly a walker's neighborhood."

— John Long, M.D., M.P.H., Contributor
References for the medical and environmental facts cited above can be found at QuietGA.com

AN EVENING WITH ABBEY GLASS

October 20

Location to be announced

Abbey Glass, who grew up in the neighborhood, is now a successful fashion designer with her own luxury womenswear line and a store in Buckhead. She will talk about her career and share some of her designs.

Anyone with a large house interested in hosting this event please contact specialevents@ansleypark.org.

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