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Using or Losing

I once naively thought that if the lawn care industry were to develop a new product that had the potential to eliminate a common complaint, the landscaper would see its value and rush to buy it. I also thought that those working so hard to prohibit this product would instead move embrace the new concept as an alternative to banning. I'm talking here about leaf blowers and the noise they make. The truth is, there are quiet leaf blowers available from several manufacturers, but choosing these over noisy blowers has been a slow transition. It has been 19 years since ECHO Inc. first introduced a quiet leaf blower and still most contractors would rather buy the noisy design.

The reason is simple as I see it. Noise equates to power and hard working men want power because that will make their job easier. Think about it. Diesel trucks, garbage trucks, crawler tractors, farm tractors, air hammers, hammer drills, wood chippers and many other noisy hand tools are powerful. Motorcycles, muscle cars and race cars are noisy and are fast. Even thunder storms are dangerous and can do a lot of damage. So how can landscapers be expected to buy a nice quiet gasoline powered leaf blower? Well, this analogy is totally misleading. Quiet leaf blowers have all the power and performance of any noisy leaf blower of comparable size and engine displacement.

Electric leaf blowers are considered quiet by some because, after all, they have electric motors which generate almost no sound, And, and, they are underpowered, reinforcing the contractor's conception of what a powerful blower should be. Hmmm, there's no debate here, or is there? Guess what? Electric leaf blowers in many cases are louder, certainly more irritating than some gasoline powered leaf blowers because they scream. It's not the motor that causes the irritation, it's the fan.

You know, all along the problem has never really been sound magnitude or volume, but most people don't understand that. There are lots of things on the lawn care contractors trailer that make more noise, but it is the gasoline powered leaf blower that has been singled out. Why should that be?

The high pitched whine common in older design leaf blowers is the culprit. It is the sound quality that sets the blower apart from the lawnmower or the generator. Today there are leaf blowers that are very quiet by design, as much as 75% quieter. Millions of dollars have been spent to bring this to the marketplace as an alternative to noisy leaf blowers. My goodness, that's an amazing accomplishment. But the real accomplishment is the elimination of the squeal so prevalent in older designs. It is the sound quality that has been so drastically improved on quiet blowers. But there is no way to quantify sound quality, so everyone dwells on sound magnitude instead. Actually, sound quality has been improved on all new leaf blowers, not only the quiet ones. It is the old, untreated leaf blower that needs to be culled. Consider this. If only one blower in the neighborhood is a screamer, all leaf blowers are reviled, even the quiet ones.

It would be nice if the anti-leaf blower activist would take a moment to compare the sound coming from a quiet leaf blower to that of an older noisy blower. Instead of banning, they might just fight for eliminating only the noisy ones from their city. I know they would be impressed, but that is not likely to make a difference if contractors continue to use old noisy blowers that scream. Although it rarely works and because they don't understand sound quality or how to determine volume in the field, activists just find it easier to ban them. They don't realize that almost every leaf blower manufactured today has a sound label indicating its measured sound magnitude making it easy to determine compliance in the field.

<http://leafblownoise.com/Sound%20label%20mounted.jpg>

When an ordinance banning leaf blowers happens in your city, everyone that uses them is instantly in violation and subject to a fine or worse. Every contractor should have a least one quiet leaf blower on his or her trailer for use where sound is an issue. Doing so will make a lot of people happy and it could make the difference between using or losing the leaf blower.

Larry Will, Leaf Blower Information Specialist, ECHO Inc.