

More Than 3,500 Violations of Santa Monica Leaf Blower Ban Reported in Three Years

By Niki Cervantes
Staff Writer

May 17, 2017 -- Although Santa Monica imposes a stiff fine, the City continues to struggle to enforce its 1991 ban of the popular but noisy and pollution-prone gardening tools, according to an update issued this month by City code enforcement officials.

Over the past three years, there were more than 3,500 reports that Santa Monica's ban on motorized leaf blowers was being violated, Sharon Guidry, the City's Code Enforcement Manager wrote in a May 8 report to the City Council.

Of the total number of cases reported, slightly more than 500 resulted in tickets being issued despite a \$500 fine for first-time violators that is higher than that of neighboring cities, she said.

Making a case can be time consuming, Guidry said, because offenses are "transitory in nature" and might require several trips before the violation is observed by code enforcement officers and action taken.

Motorized leaf blowing cases comprise almost a quarter of the code enforcement division's workload, Guidry said.

About 85 percent of the cases come from members of the public who file complaints, including online, by telephone or via email.

The rest are caught by enforcement officers during their daily patrols. Cases were reported citywide.

The ban applies to "any motorized tool (gas, electric, or battery powered) used to propel fallen leaves, grass clippings or debris for removal."

The City allows such alternatives as using a push broom, a rake, or a manual leaf sweeping machine or leaf vacuum. Hosing surfaces to remove

leaves or debris is also prohibited.

In some instances, informational door hangers are put on front doors so a resident is aware of the violation.

Three offenses are allowed before the case is referred to the City Attorney's Office, although there have been no prosecutions to date, the report said.

The City began prohibiting motorized leaf blowers more than two and a half decades ago in response to complaints about noise and pollution.

Problems persisted, and the law was strengthened in 2010 to require property owners, owners and operators of landscaping companies, property management companies and the leaf blower operators to all shoulder responsibility for violations and the \$500 fine attached.

Santa Monica's law is stricter than that of surrounding communities, including Culver City, West Hollywood, Pasadena, Malibu and Los Angeles, City staff said.

Four of the five cities prohibit gas-powered leaf blowers but allow electric or battery-powered blowers. Three of the cities permit the use of leaf blowers during restricted daytime hours.

An update to the City Council this month said another 163 cases of leaf blower violations had been reported in the first three months of this year.

That's about half the usual number, likely due to the weather, Guidry said.

“At about 50 per month, the current rate is about half of what the division has investigated monthly over the past three years, possibly due to the unusually high rainfall experienced in the area during these months,” she said.