



NEWTON (CBS) – Since new leaf blower restrictions took effect this year, Newton police have received hundreds of **complaints** from residents. The flood of leaf blower-related calls has forced the department to adjust how officers respond, concerned the contentious issue is putting a strain on their **resources**.

Karen Bray is leader of the group [Newton Citizens Against Leaf Blower Mania](#), which advocated strongly for restrictions that took effect in April.

The [ordinance now prohibits the use of gas-powered blowers](#) from Memorial Day to Labor Day. It also requires a 65-decibel noise limit on leaf blowers all year. Bray, who works from home, does not disguise her disdain for the yard equipment. If it were up to her, they would be banned.

“They have a high-pitched, screeching whine,” Bray expressed. “They raise your blood pressure. When you’re in your home office, it’s impossible to think. The quality of life has been very decreased by the overuse of leaf blowers.”

The Newton regulations passed after an extremely heated debate at City Hall, pitting landscaping companies against residents decrying the noise, health and environmental effects of leaf blowers.

“We didn’t know what to expect,” said Lt. Bruce Apotheker, a spokesman for the Newton Police Department.

But safe to say the police department did not expect this: Since the regulations took effect in April, police had responded to about 320 leaf blower complaints through the beginning of October.

A list of incidents WBZ obtained show that about 75 percent of the time, when an officer arrived at the property, the landscaping company was either gone, not using a leaf blower, or following the rules.

The police department has taken an educational approach to inform landscaping crews about the new rules, Apotheker said. Officers have issued only seven citations to repeat violators compared to more than 80 verbal and written warnings.

**Because of the volume of calls, Apotheker said Chief David MacDonald had to make adjustments. The Chief decided no more than one officer could respond to a leaf blower complaint at the same time.**

**“We didn’t want to sacrifice public safety,” Apotheker explained. “We didn’t think that was the best use of public resources.”**

**City records show the top 15 callers make up roughly 42 percent of leaf blower complaints. The most frequent caller has dialed police 18 different times.**

**A list of incidents show some people called to complain about leaf blowers, but the noise turned out to be lawnmowers, weed whackers, a crew removing a tree, and workers paving a driveway.**

“From what I gather, people have been calling every time they see a landscaping truck,” said Mike Caruso, the business owner of Caruso Bros. who has worked in the industry since 1976. “It makes me frustrated. It makes me just want to say, ‘The heck with Newton.’”

Caruso and other landscaping companies argue the less powerful equipment makes it tougher for crews to finish their jobs efficiently. And for customers, more time equals more money.

As trees start to shed their leaves, the meat of the leaf blower season is just beginning.

“The laws of physics and economics are not exempt from the City of Newton,” Caruso said. “You can buy a can of compressed air and it’s better than the leaf blower we are allowed to use.”

Earlier this summer, photos circulated that depicted city-hired subcontractors skirting the leaf blower rules to clean up large properties.

Bob DeRubeis, the commissioner of the Parks and Recreation Department, told WBZ he sent a letter to all three subcontractors, warning them to comply with the ordinance or risk losing their contracts.

In one instance, an employee with a landscaping company even reported being assaulted by a neighbor on Sumner Street. The altercation occurred as the resident tried taking photos of the crew as they worked, according to the report.

“Tempers are apparently building in the neighborhood over this issue,” the officer wrote.

Brookline also saw a surge of complaints when its leaf blower ordinance first hit the books several years ago, but calls have been steadily dropping, according Deputy Superintendent Michael Gropman, a spokesman for the police department.

The town has now hired a code enforcement officer to respond to complaints so fewer police officer resources are drained.

In Arlington, an inspector with the health department investigates an estimated 10 to 20 complaints received on an annual basis, a town official told WBZ.

Bray concedes the current scenario is not the best use of police resources in Newton and said the ordinance may require more discussion when a new mayor and city council are voted into office in November.

“I wish it could be enforced in another way,” Bray said. “But the best thing would be if landscapers stopped breaking the law.”

*Ryan Kath can be reached at [rkath@cbs.com](mailto:rkath@cbs.com). You can also follow him on Twitter or connect on Facebook.*