

# Leaf blowers to be quieted

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By [BEN LEVINE](#)

blevine@thestamfordtimes.com

STAMFORD — After several weeks of discussion, debate and demonstrations, city legislators have decided to regulate the use of commercial leaf blowers.

On Monday, March 24, the legislative and rules committee unanimously passed an amendment to the city's noise ordinance that would require professional landscapers to use blowers certified to produce 65 decibels or less.

The full board will vote on the amended ordinance at its regular meeting, Monday, April 7. If passed, the committee would most likely hold a public hearing in April, before the amended ordinance is voted on for adoption.

Stamford's noise ordinance limiting domestic power equipment was passed in 1985 but until now, the language did not address commercial power equipment such as leaf blowers.

The committee had considered amending the city's noise ordinance to include regulation of not only equipment's decibel levels, but hours of operation. It also considered amending the ordinance for other lawn-care equipment as well, but in the end, the committee determined it needed an ordinance that was enforceable.

"We decided to limit the scope of the ordinance (to commercial leaf blowers), because doing otherwise would have meant very complex legislation that wouldn't pass," said City Rep. Gregory Lodato (R-20).

Under the newly written ordinance, leaf blowers will be required to have a manufacturer's sticker that indicates its decibel output, making it easy for police to enforce. In the original legislation proposed by Lodato, police would have been required to use noise meters to check decibel levels.

Newly manufactured leaf blowers come equipped with the necessary sticker, making compliance with the ordinance relatively easy. Lodato did say that some landscapers — who are directly affected by the rule change — might have to purchase new equipment. And while he recognizes the upfront capital investment, he believes encouraging landscapers to purchase modern equipment that make less noise is a good thing.

"It's a moderate ordinance, and one that doesn't make it impossible for landscapers to do business," Lodato said.

Other municipalities, such as Greenwich, have stiffer noise restrictions on the books. In Greenwich, the maximum noise output for lawn equipment in a residential area is 55 decibels.

In January the committee invited Larry Will, a retired vice president of the lawn-care equipment manufacturer Echo Inc., to give his expertise on leaf blowers, and to give a demonstration on the various noise outputs of gas- and electric-powered leaf blowers.

Will said manufacture's labels are in accordance with standards set by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), which measures lawn-care equipment's decibel output 50 feet from the source.

Leaf blowers that were made more than 10 years ago, typically produced decibel levels in the 74 to 77 range, Will said. He said that as you reduce output by six decibels, you are reducing sound intensity by 50 percent. So, by reducing the decibel output of leaf blower from 77 to 65 decibels, its sound intensity is cut by 75 percent, he said.

"At 65 decibels, the noise is similar to an office environment of 10 people who are talking and clicking keyboards. It's no longer considered an annoying noise level," Will said.

Of course the decibel level for the operator of leaf blower is much more intense, reaching as high as 105, and for that reason operators should always wear protective ear muffs, Will said.

Lodato credits Will's testimony as the swaying factor into the ordinance's new language. Will said police and the city can rely on the manufacturer's sticker as a credible way to enforce the ordinance.

"If someone has a leaf blower that doesn't have a sticker, you might as well assume it doesn't comply," Will said. "Making a quiet blower is a selling point, so if the sticker is not there, the manufacturer is not eager to advertise it's not (a quiet leaf blower)."

Will said that all Echo products are labeled with decibel output regardless of how loud or quiet they are.

Paul Tuccinardi, who runs PT Landscape Contractors Inc., said he has always done his best to ensure that his employees don't run leaf blowers at full blast or too early in the morning.

In regards to the new restrictions on decibel levels, Tuccinardi said, "I don't think it will affect my business."

Local noise ordinances must conform to the state noise control plan and need the approval of the state's Commissioner of Environmental Protection, before they can be enforced, according to the state's general statutes. Once a draft has been submitted to the Department of Environmental Protection for review, a decision on the ordinance is usually made within two weeks.