



November 28, 2016

Dear Residents:

The Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers encourages all residents to read the enclosed information provided by the Village's Environment & Energy Committee regarding the operation of leaf blowers. With this past week's high winds bringing down the remaining leaves, the committee provides timely information regarding the effects that leaf blowers—especially gas-powered units—can have on the environment.

The enclosed letter outlines helpful tips that you and your lawn service company can implement to reduce the noise and pollution generated by the use of leaf blowers.

Should you have any questions regarding this information and how you can implement environmentally-responsible lawn care practices on your property, please visit the Environment & Energy Committee's page on the Village website at www.chevychasevillagemd.gov or email the Committee's Co-Chairs: Marea Hatziolos at marea.hatziolos@gmail.com or Marilyn Bracken at marbracken@msn.com.

Sincerely,

Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers

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Dear Village Residents:

Living in the Village with its lush greenspace and tranquil setting so close to the District line is a privilege and one of the main attractions drawing residents to this location since it was founded in 1890. Maintaining the natural assets and quality of life in the Village is a prime objective of the Board of Managers and a responsibility we all share as residents. One way to achieve this is to embrace more sustainable practices in the choices we make and how we live as a community.

The Chevy Chase Village Environment and Energy Committee, whose main mandate is to educate residents and the Board about issues and solutions that can bring us closer to our goal of becoming a sustainable community, has brought to our attention an issue that has long been a concern of many Village residents. The issue can be divisive in some communities, but we think it can be addressed with common sense and consideration for our neighbors. The issue is the use of gas-powered leaf blowers for yard maintenance and the impacts it has on the peace and quiet of the Village and on the quality of life of Village residents more broadly. As the use of such blowers has expanded in the community and extended to all seasons of the year except winter, it is worth taking a fresh look at the costs and benefits associated with leaf blowers and some possible alternatives to their use.

Pollution issues:

While leaf blowers offer a convenient way to deal with the steady volume of leaves throughout the fall, this convenience comes at a cost. The most significant has to do with the various forms of pollution emitted, particularly from gas-powered blowers, which are highly inefficient at combusting fuel. Beyond the noise and dust generated by leaf blowers, gas powered blowers also emit CO₂—a greenhouse gas; carbon monoxide which is toxic; and black carbon—a particulate form of carbon which, once released into the atmosphere, can infiltrate the lungs and aggravate respiratory problems, especially in children and the elderly, who may also be sensitive to allergens in the dust.¹

Although the Village has adopted Montgomery County's regulations on the maximum decibel level that leaf blowers may emit (70 decibels at a distance of 50 ft), and restrictions on hours of operation, noise is still an issue for many residents who work from home or simply want to enjoy the peace and quiet on a beautiful fall day in the Village. There are, however, no County provisions (or Village regulations) to address the more serious pollution issues related to carbon emissions, air-borne dust and debris--and their cumulative impacts on residents' health and the environment.

¹ "Most gas-powered leaf blowers and weed trimmers are 2-stroke engines, which are light and inexpensive, but remarkably inefficient at fuel combustion. They emit high levels of nitrous oxide (NO), hydrocarbons (HC), and carbon monoxide (CO). According to the California Air Resources Board, these engines emit 499 times more HC, 49 times more particulates, and 26 times more carbon monoxide than an average car. With wind speeds exceeding 180 MPH, mold and fungal spores, weed seeds, pollen, lawn pesticides, and animal feces are blown into the air that we breathe, staying aloft for hours to even days. Our children are particularly vulnerable with their small but rapidly growing bodies, and because they are most likely to be playing outdoors." *Lawrence S. Block, MD. Swamscott Board of Health, MA.*

The Environment and Energy Committee has researched these issues, as well as what other communities are doing to address them. It has identified a number of good practices related to leaf removal and lawn care, which can help reduce the worst impacts of leaf blower use, or eliminate the need for them altogether. The Committee's research has been informed by consultations with Montgomery County officials in the Department of Environment, landscape contractors (including those operating in the Village), and neighboring communities.

A list of these green practices is provided below. Furthermore, the Committee has also found that several landscape providers operating in the Village, have expressed interest in offering residents a "green" service contract option, which would address many of these concerns. The menu of options would include good practices, viewed in the industry as environmentally friendly, less potentially hazardous, and more sustainable (i.e., from a financial, environmental, and social perspective).

The Board of Managers encourages residents to review the list of good practices presented below, and to consider adopting those which make sense in the context of their property maintenance, and to respect the rights of neighbors. Households which employ landscape providers are encouraged to discuss with them the possibility of selecting from a menu of green options in designing a landscape service agreement for the year. The Village will maintain a list of such "green providers" on its website for reference by Village Residents.

Good practices:

1. Use a lower speed on your blower to reduce noise and polluting dust in the air. This should not affect the efficiency of most blowers in clearing leaves and debris from medium-sized properties.
2. Instruct your lawn care providers to use only one leaf blower at a time on the property. This would help bring noise levels in compliance with Montgomery County Noise regulations.
3. Apply only organic fertilizers like compost from natural sources—no synthetics, and no synthetic pesticides.
4. Switch to an electric leaf blower—several new models are available—these are less polluting in that they do not emit black carbon or Carbon Monoxide. [Note: If you currently offset your electricity with renewable energy, the overall operation becomes carbon neutral.]

A measure has recently been proposed in the District that would limit leaf blowing and lawn clean up to electric-only apparatus. The proposal-- the Leaf Blower Regulation Amendment Act of 2016—would amend the District's Noise Control Act of 1977. The legislation would prohibit the sale and use of gasoline-powered leaf blowers in the District, effective January 1, 2022. This delayed entry into force would allow lawn-care providers time to phase in electric leaf blowers, as they replace gas-powered blowers whose useful time limit (typically 3-5 years) has been reached.

5. Eliminate use of leaf blowers altogether. Hand rake the leaves and dispose of at curbside for collection. Or, use a mulch blade on your mower to mow and mulch leaves in place, providing an organic layer which fertilizers your lawn through the fall and winter months, eliminating the

need to collect and dispose of leaves, thereby also reducing cost and the carbon footprint involved in leaf collection and disposal. **This is by far the best option from a sustainability standpoint; it should result in time and cost savings to households, as well.**

Other green practices related to organic landscaping include the phasing out of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers altogether in favor of natural biological control agents, such as pest eating insects (lady bugs) and birds, pest resistant plant varieties, and composting.

Landscape companies are beginning to see demand for greener practices in landscaping as a new business opportunity. With industrial leaf blowers needing to be replaced every 3 years or so, some companies are poised to invest in the latest technology that is easy and safe to operate, quieter and less polluting than gas-powered models, and responds to consumer demand for environmentally friendly products and practices.

As part of the Sustainable Living Lecture Series organized by the E&E Committee for Village and neighboring residents at the Village Hall, the Committee plans to host an information forum on this topic within the next couple of months. The forum will include landscape contractors, county representatives, specialists in green landscaping, and Village residents. Please stay tuned for more information about this on the Village website and in the *Crier*.

The Chevy Chase Village Environment & Energy Committee

