

Maryland PIRG

HB91: Fossil Fuel-Powered Lawn and Garden Care Equipment - State Purchase, Use, and Contracts - Prohibition

Health and Government Operations

January 23, 2024

Position: Favorable

Maryland PIRG is a state based, small donor funded public interest advocacy organization with grassroots members across the state. We work to find common ground around common sense solutions that will help ensure a healthier, safer, more secure future.

Maryland PIRG supports HB91 to phase out the purchase and use of fossil-fuel lawn equipment by the state.

Gas-powered lawn and garden equipment produces an astonishing amount of pollution -and ear-splitting noise – right into the faces of the people operating them and into our neighborhoods.

According to Maryland PIRG Foundation’s October report, [Lawn Care Goes Electric](#), lawn and garden equipment in Maryland emitted an estimated 597 tons of harmful “fine particulate” air pollution in 2020 – an amount equivalent to the pollution emitted by 6.4 million typical cars over the course of a year.

Using EPA’s latest National Emissions Inventory the report also found that Montgomery County ranked 16th amongst U.S. counties for “fine particulate” air pollution in 2020, with Prince George’s, Baltimore, and Anne Arundel Counties all ranking in the top 100 as well.

The pollutants emitted by gas-powered lawn equipment include fine particulates ([PM2.5](#)), ozone-forming nitrogen oxides ([NOx](#)) and volatile organic compounds ([VOCs](#)), and air toxics such as [benzene](#), [1,3-butadiene](#) and [formaldehyde](#). Exposure to these pollutants in our air has been linked to health problems including asthma attacks, reproductive ailments, mental health challenges, cancer and even premature deaths. Because they burn fossil fuels, gas lawn mowers and leaf blowers also emit climate pollution.

Here’s a snapshot from our report on the amount of pollution from gas powered lawn and garden equipment in Maryland as a whole in 2020:

- 1,839 tons of nitrogen oxides. This is equivalent to the nitrogen oxide emissions from 822,556 cars over the course of a year.
- 722,471 tons of carbon dioxide. This is equivalent to the carbon dioxide emissions from 159,045 cars over the course of a year.
- 597 tons of fine particulates (PM 2.5). This is equivalent to the fine particulate (PM 2.5) emissions from 6,404,064 cars over the course of a year.

We don’t need to tolerate this level of pollution when cleaner, quieter electric lawn and garden equipment is ready for prime time. Electric equipment is also making inroads in the commercial sector, with an increasing array of available options. When it comes to the most polluting equipment, namely handheld tools and some push mowers that utilize inefficient two-stroke engine technology, electric equipment has proven to be a viable option for most commercial

applications. To address concerns about certain types of electric tools, e.g. chainsaws, not being up to the task, we recommend that the state and companies consult with experts such as the American Green Zone Alliance (AGZA) to ensure they're purchasing the right tool for the application. For the few exceptions in the realm of lawn and garden maintenance where gas equipment is still needed, this bill contains reasonable exemptions to accommodate these needs.

While the transition won't happen overnight, for residential users and commercial industry alike: the future of lawn care is electric. It just takes a quick google search to see that from [Baltimore City](#) to [Harford County](#) to [Montgomery County](#), companies are offering emission-free law service. Entrepreneurs and business owners report high customer demand for quieter, fume-free property maintenance and have found a variety of ways to make this equipment work for their business models. They report they also save money on operating costs versus traditional gas-powered equipment.

Our report discusses this in more detail but essentially the average residential user will save money over a maximum of five years by using an electric mower compared to a gas-powered one. For commercial users, there are of course additional upfront costs such as extra batteries and charging infrastructure, but the potential cost savings over time are even greater because of the high fuel and maintenance costs of gas equipment and the higher utilization rates of this equipment versus residential users.

The state taking the lead by phasing out fossil-fuel powered lawn equipment is a smart public policy.

We recommend a favorable report.