

California could ban sale of gas-powered leaf blowers under proposed clean air law

By Andrew Sheeler

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California would ban the sale of new gas-powered leaf-blowers, lawnmowers and other “small off-road engines” as soon as 2024, under a bill being considered by state lawmakers.

If approved, the ban would go into effect on Jan. 1, 2024, or as soon as the California Air Resources Board determines it is feasible.

Members of the Assembly Natural Resources Committee this week advanced the proposed law, Assembly Bill 1346. Assemblyman Marc Berman, D-Menlo Park, wrote the bill and described it as an important effort to reduce air pollution.

One hour of use of a gas-powered leaf blower produces the equivalent emissions of a vehicle driving 1,100 miles from Los Angeles to Denver, according to the California Air Resources Board.

“Gallon for gallon, these engines pollute at a substantially higher rate than other equipment and vehicles,” Berman said Wednesday.

Those emissions can be harmful to inhale, and lead to health complications for those who do so, Berman said.

The Air Resource Board projects that daily emissions from small off-road engines like gas-powered leaf blowers and lawnmowers will produce more missions than all passenger cars in California this year.

REBATES FOR COMMERCIAL LANDSCAPERS?

Berman said his bill also directs the Air Resources Board to direct funding to state air districts to offer rebates to commercial users, such as landscapers, to buy zero-emission equipment.

“It’s quiet and most importantly, it doesn’t emit ozone forming pollutants that adversely affect human health and contribute to climate change,” he said.

Several groups, including the American Lung Association in California, the Coalition for Clean Air and Sierra Club California support the bill.

One group, the Virginia-based Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, spoke in opposition to the bill. Greg Knott, speaking on behalf of that group, said that Berman’s bill, and a separate regulation currently being considered by the Air Resources Board, pose numerous technology, feasibility, economic and implementation challenges for industry stakeholders.

“Collectively, these challenges are insurmountable and will result in significant hardships for manufacturers, retailers and end users, culminating in an early market shortfall of products with high consumer need and demand,” he said.

CHAINSAWS, LEAF BLOWERS WANTED IN RURAL CALIFORNIA

The bill also faced criticism from Republican Assemblymen Devon Mathis of Visalia and Kelly Seyarto of Murrieta.

“My first job was using this equipment,” Mathis said in remarks Wednesday.

Mathis said that commercial users would be required to carry several battery packs to power their zero-emission equipment, making it unfeasible for many landscapers and other users of the tools.

“What are we going to do with all these extra needed batteries as they deplete and they go bad?” Mathis asked.

Seyarto said that cities already have the power to ban gas-powered leaf-blowers and the like if they choose to.

“I think it’s really more of a local control thing, I think localities should determine what works for their area, what works for their workers,” he said.

Seyarto said that “we all want clean air” but that the bill would have an impact on the livelihoods of many people who depend on that equipment.

The bill also met with resistance from Democratic Assemblyman Jim Wood, of Santa Rosa.

Wood said that people in his district rely on equipment like chainsaws, particularly when hardening their homes against wildfires.

“I walk around the Capitol here in the mornings, and I hate those leaf blowers. I hate the dust that they put up and I hate the emissions and I worry about the workers. But I live in a different world,” he said.

AB 1346 passed through the Assembly Natural Resources Committee on a 7-3 vote. The bill moves next to the Assembly Appropriations Committee.