

Written testimony on SB 525 from Alan Shusterman, 3/23/2023

March 23, 2023

To: Senate Committee on Energy and Environment

From: Alan Shusterman, Portland, Oregon, alan@reed.edu

Re: SB 525 (citizen testimony in support of the bill)

I am writing to express my support for SB 525, a bill that will limit, perhaps eliminate, gas-powered leaf blowers as a tool for maintenance and clean up. There are many good reasons to switch from gas-powered to electric-powered devices, including the following:

- Noise reduction. As I type this on Thursday morning (3/23), I can hear two workers (not at my residence, but 30-80 yards away) blasting away with gas-powered leaf blowers. They come every week, whether there are leaves or not. (In fact, the city swept our streets of leaves back in December, 2022 and there has been almost no plant debris in yards or on the streets, but a job is a job and these folks come every week.) Fortunately, at this time of year, they can get their “leaf blowing” completed in just an hour or two at this time of year (they are mostly blowing dirt around), but at other times of the year, they blow and blow for much longer periods. Unfortunately, this Thursday morning is not exceptional. Because of the number of neighborhood yards maintained by garden services (or gas-motor-equipped home owners), I get to hear gas-powered leaf blowers through my closed double-pane window morning and afternoon, 5 or more days a week. The noise levels are awful, far surpassing that of the traffic on my street (15th Ave is a neighborhood arterial and 1000’s of cars and trucks drive past my house every day). The noise levels guarantee my hearing loss and will force me to purchase expensive hearing aids in another year or two so I will be paying a steep price for my neighbors’ “clean” yards. The noise also significantly reduces the quality of life for several hours each day in what is supposed to be a quiet, residential neighborhood.
- Emissions. Unlike car exhaust, which is processed (“cleaned”) by expensive catalytic converters before being released into the air we breathe, the smaller gas-powered motors on leaf blowers and other devices spew a dirty, unhealthy mix of pollutants. My Ph.D. is in chemistry (U. Wisconsin-Madison, 1981 and emeritus professor, chemistry, Reed College, 1989-2021) and I can assure you that the toxic brew of pollutants from these motors contains numerous carcinogens and chemicals that attack lung tissue. More recent research also attributes other health problems, such as heart disease and dementia, to exposure to these pollutants. If all this wasn’t bad enough, the emissions include carbon dioxide, the most important greenhouse gas. The scientists advising the United Nations on climate change just released a report last week that emphatically states that we have even less time than previously thought to cut back significantly on greenhouse gas emissions. And while it may seem like the folks who clean up your yard with their gas-powered leaf blowers only wave them around for an hour or so, rest assured that their next job, and all the jobs after that, get the same CO₂-releasing treatment that your yard did. I wouldn’t be surprised if a typical yard maintenance crew

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runs its leaf-blowers for 4 or more hours each day, far longer, in fact, than the time most of us spend in our cars.

- Worker health and quality of life. Everything I am saying about impacts on my life pale in comparison to what is experienced by the workers who operate these devices for a living. They deserve safer working conditions. Switching from gas-powered to electric-powered devices will go a long way towards accomplishing this.

The time to act is now. Please approve SB 525 and put Oregon on a path to healthier, cleaner, more sustainable living. Thank you.