

Statement by Gregg Easterbrook
D.C. City Council July 2, 2018
Committee of the Whole hearing on the Leaf Blower Regulation
Amendment Act of 2017 (Bill No. 22-234)

My name is Gregg Easterbrook. I am a contributing editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* and a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. My *Atlantic* colleague James Fallows, the former White House official, is submitting for the record a detailed statement on what I will say in brief.

I've written extensively about the interaction of new technology and quality of life, including in my current book. The conclusion reached that is relevant to what the Council considers today is as follows. In every case – not in many cases, in every case – when clean new technology replaces obsolete technology, quality of life improves, costs are lower than expected and people say, "Why didn't we do this sooner!"

Replacing out-of-date two-stroke gasoline leaf blowers with advanced battery powered models will be the same. Initially people will complain about excessive government intervention. Once the reform is in place they will say, "Why didn't we do this sooner!"

A guiding example is the interaction between Americans and technology as concerns the automobile. For 50 years, cars have gotten safer, cleaner and more reliable while adding countless features. At every turn, industry predicted incredible expense, technical impossibility or consumer revolt. None of these things happened.

Today any new car emits about 1 percent of the smog forming emissions of cars of a generation ago, yet has more horsepower and higher mileage. Risk of death per mile traveled is today about one quarter what it was a generation ago. Meanwhile the inflation-adjusted cost of cars has not risen.

Yard equipment is of course not as important as cars, but moving from obsolete leaf-blower designs to new models will follow the same sequence – safer and cleaner with more benefits than costs.

This is especially true with the United States population aging, and chronic impacts of aging increasingly seen as public-health issues. One chronic impact, hearing loss, may not necessarily be something that “just happens.” It may have causes that can be addressed. One is the low-frequency sound produced by obsolete two-stroke motors.

If this sound were essential for the operation of society, well then, that would be that. But the sound of antiquated engines can be eliminated, and everyone will say, “Why didn’t we do that sooner!” In the process we’ll reduce smog-forming emissions, which would not be the purpose of the regulation but will be a nice bonus.

By acting now, the District can take a leadership position on this issue.