



Providence Noise Project

"Noise is the New Smoking"

Feb. 3, 2026

House Municipal Governance Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly

Governance Committee members,

The Providence Noise Project is a resident-created non-profit organization that seeks to reduce excessive, unhealthy, and mostly unnecessary noise in Rhode Island's capital and largest city — and the home of the General Assembly.

As such, Committee members must know at how loud Providence can be, and are perhaps even glad they don't live here and have to endure that noise all day every day. They might also wonder why the city government doesn't do more to reduce the excessive noise levels here.

The volunteers and supporters of the Noise Project wonder that too, and have been using the democratic process to try to compel city leaders to reduce noise. Among those sources is gas-fueled leafblowers and other landscaping equipment, which mostly use two-stroke engines.

As a simple Google search will reveal, two-stroke engines burn a mixture of gas *and* oil, yet do so incompletely, which means the emissions (to say nothing of the spilled fuel) are actually toxic to those operating them, others nearby, and the wider environment we all live in.

Among the toxic emissions from gas leafblowers are both cancer-causing chemicals *and* dangerously high noise levels of 80 decibels and above. You may think noise isn't toxic in the same way chemicals are, but in fact decades of scientific research, dating back to the 1960s, indicates that noise from a wide variety of sources is a significant threat to public health.

The European Environment Agency (the EU's equivalent to the U.S. EPA) warns that noise is the second-most harmful environmental threat after air pollution — and leafblowers emit high amounts of both! That is the primary reason the General Assembly passed a bill in 2024 to subsidize the replacement of gas-fueled leafblowers with cleaner and quieter electric models.

If the Assembly voted to replace gas leafblowers less than two years ago, why are a handful of its members trying to prevent municipalities from regulating them for the same reasons? Is their toxic pollution no longer harmful to workers and those nearby? Or is this really about commerce, and very small group of landscaping company owners that want workers and the public to subsidize their continued use of dangerously polluting emissions with their health?

After more than a decade of city residents demanding action on leafblowers, the Providence City Council *finally* passed an incredibly prolonged ordinance to regulate and eventually end gas leafblower usage. It provides a seven-year period for landscapers and homeowners to transition to electric equipment, which our research indicates is the longest phase-out period in the U.S.

The landscapers' catch-all response to any and all efforts to even slightly regulate two-stroke engine pollution is to claim that battery technology "isn't ready yet." It's a convenient deflection because it's open-ended and doesn't rely on any equipment-performance metrics that could be used to compare electric tools to gas-fueled ones. To them, electric tools will never be ready.

The Providence allows seven years to transition, and in getting a few Assembly members to introduce H7150, the landscapers are effectively saying that they can see nearly a decade into the future, and they know that electric equipment "won't be ready" in 2033!

So the questions are **1)** when will it be "ready"? Or is that just a convenient dodge to forestall sustainable landscaping forever? And if it's the latter, **2)** why should the Municipal Governance Committee and the larger General Assembly aid and abet the landscapers' efforts to resist the ongoing and inevitable transition to electric-powered equipment?

Finally, **3)** How does that help the vast majority of the residents of Rhode Island?

Submitted on behalf of the Providence Noise Project,

John Wilner
Communications Coordinator