

Rhode Island Medical Society

EST. 1612

Rhode Island House of Representatives
Members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Representative David, A Bennett, Chair.

March 9, 2023

In Support of H5549, the “Zero-Emission Lawn Care Devices Act”

Dear Chair Bennett and Committee Members:

The Rhode Island Medical Society, Climate Change and Health Committee and its members endorse H5549, the Zero Emission Lawn Care device act introduced by Reps. Koalas and Ajello.

Addressing the wide-ranging policy solutions to combat climate change, the Rhode Island Medical Society (RIMS) Climate Change and Health Committee is a group of physicians from many different medical specialties, committed to offering physician experience in the conversations on green energy, climate change, waste, renewable/reusable products, and sustainable living issues.

Lawn care devices such as leaf blowers/vacuums, lawn mowers, and edgers/trimmers powered by fossil fuels are deleterious to the health and safety of persons who use them, as well as the society at large. According to the EPA, 5% of total air pollution in the US, and 45% of non-road gasoline emissions were generated by lawn care equipment. Specifically two stroke engines were responsible for the vast majority of fine particulate matter (PM), for which there is *no safe level of exposure*. The emissions from an hour of commercial gasoline mower are driving a car 200-640 miles. Additionally, spilled fuel - estimated at 17 million gallons per year - pollutes soil and groundwater.

As physicians, we feel strongly that the health implications of such exposures are numerous and substantial both to the lawn care professionals using this equipment, and the community at large through the release of carbon into the atmosphere. Operators are exposed to high levels of emissions for many hours a day; placing them at risk for development and exacerbation of lung disease, cardiovascular disease such as stroke or heart attack, as well as cancers and psychiatric disease. Additionally, the noise produced by these machines is damaging to hearing and a generalized nuisance. Operators are often persons of color and seasonal workers, bringing environmental justice to the forefront.

In keeping with the Act on Climate law, Rhode Island must achieve mandatory carbon emission reduction that lead to net zero emissions by 2050. Lawn care devices contribute significantly to carbon emission, and are a “low hanging fruit” in the work to reduce the burning of fossil fuels. There are powerful electric alternatives available for both commercial and individual use. H5549 will speed the transition away from fossil fuel machines to their safer and quieter alternatives, bringing with it health benefits to lawn care professionals and the entire community.

We urge you to pass H5549 for the health and safety of the community through promoting the rapid transition away from fossil fuels.

Sincerely,

Victoria Leytin, MD; Alison Hayward, MD; Katelyn Moretti, MD
RI Medical Society, Climate Change and Health Committee