

## Guest Commentary from the Committee of the Islands

### **COTI: Should Sanibel Ban Fuel-Powered Leaf Blowers?**

By Barbara Joy Cooley, Board Member, Committee of the Islands



In the summer of 2017, the Village of Key Biscayne decided to ban fuel-powered leaf blowers within their town limits. Why did they do this? Here are reasons listed in their village council's ordinance:

- The Village seeks to further enhance and protect the Village's environment by eliminating the use of these blowers that can emit pollutants
- Small gas engines, such as those used in many leaf blowers, contribute ozone-damaging emissions to the environment and it is anticipated that ozone-contributing pollutants from small gas engines will exceed those same emissions from vehicles around 2020

- The Village Council finds that this ordinance is necessary for the preservation of the public health, safety and welfare of the Village's residents.

While the official reasons stated for banning fuel-powered leaf blowers in the Village of Key Biscayne are related to air pollution, the discussions held in the village council chambers clearly included concerns about the loud noise (noise pollution) produced by this kind of leaf blower. Council members noted that the village received many complaints about noise from leaf blowers.

Contractors were given six months to comply with the ban, replacing their fuel powered blowers with rakes, brooms and/or battery-powered leaf blowers.

Battery-powered leaf blowers are expensive – costing around \$300 to \$900 – and the batteries last for about 12 hours per charge. But since the ordinance took effect this past February, there have been practically no complaints about the ban from contractors or others in Key Biscayne.

According to village council member Katie Petros, who spearheaded the ordinance, the workers actually like the change. The electric battery-powered blowers are lighter, quieter, and better for their respiratory health.

Elsewhere in Florida, bans on gas-powered leaf blowers have been and are being considered. Palm Beach recently banned fuel-powered blowers on properties of less than one acre. Key West is reportedly drafting a proposal. Groups in Miami, South Miami, and Coral Gables are interested in banning these blowers.

Here in Sanibel, our code requires that blowers have mufflers (which are ineffective in stopping much noise), and the code only limits their use to the hours of 8AM to 9PM, seven days a week. In Sanibel, there is no decibel limit placed on blowers or other lawn equipment. Decibel limits are difficult to enforce, anyway; code enforcement officers would have to catch the perpetrators in the act.

Many people claim that mufflers on leaf blowers are ineffective. But even if they were effective in reducing noise pollution, they do not help reduce the air pollution caused by these devices.

What are your thoughts about leaf blowers on Sanibel? Are they a significant problem? Should they be better regulated by the City? We'd like to know what you think.

*Barbara Joy Cooley chairs COTI's Environment Committee. COTI invites your input on this and other issues affecting our Island. Send an email to [coti@coti.org](mailto:coti@coti.org). Mail may also be sent to PO Box 88, Sanibel, Florida 33957. To read our past commentaries on Island issues, visit our website at [www.coti.org](http://www.coti.org). Or visit Committee of the Islands on Facebook.*

Caption: Board Member and Environment Committee Chair Barbara Joy Cooley.