

Testimony to House Energy and Environment committee, 6/18/19

Hello. Thank you to chairman Helm and members of the House Energy and Environment committee. And our thanks to our bill sponsors, Reps Keny-Guyer and Smith Warner, and Senators Fagan and Dembrow.

My name is Michael Hall and I am a member of QuietCleanPDX an organization with hundreds of active supporters. Our goal is the elimination of GLBs and we are advocating a ban on those devices for environmental and public health reasons at the city, county and state levels.

Elimination of GLBs, and particularly two-cycle GLBs has become a national movement over these past few years. Organizations such as Quiet Communities and American Green Zone Alliance (AGZA) have helped us and numerous other communities in transitioning from GLBs to battery powered equipment and, where practical, hand tools. With their help, the District of Columbia recently passed a ban on the sale and operation of all GLBs, effective starting in 2022.

At last count, over 170 U.S. municipalities and counties have regulations that ban or restrict the operation of GLBs. But no state, even California, has passed legislation banning the devices altogether. So Oregon has yet another opportunity to be a national leader on this issue. No vote on the bill will happen this session, but we hope to lay the groundwork for future legislation.

It is appropriate that this discussion happens here in Energy and Environment, because two-cycle GLBs damage the environment...and an energy-related solution is readily available. Battery power.

Written testimony submitted to the public record and the testimony you are hearing today demonstrate public and operator health hazards as well as environmental damage caused by these devices. The Findings section of HB3350 describes those hazards and that damage.

Noise pollution is an irritation in our society, and it also has debilitating effects on our health. Drawing just from the World Health Organization and Consumer Reports, we know that it increases stress and blood pressure, elevates heart conditions such as atrial fibrillation, tinnitus, sleep disturbance, obesity, diabetes, adverse birth outcomes, and cognitive impairment of children.

We recognize that different parts of the state, urban and rural for example, may have different levels of concern about the use of two-cycle GLBs. The health hazards, however, impact a variety of demographics across the state,

from city residents to landscape workers, many of whom are from immigrant populations, often low-wage workers with no health care.

Environmental justice is an important element in our campaign. We subscribe to the environmental justice statement of OPAL (Organizing People, Activating Leaders): “Environmental justice requires that all people, regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, have the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards.”

We have reached out to VERDE and to Voz to invite conversation around the impact of transitioning from fossil fuel to battery powered lawn and garden equipment. And we look forward to finding common ground with them and their workers.

We understand that some industry groups may oppose the national campaign to eliminate two-cycle GLBs. Change is difficult for some industries, even when the the health of that industry’s workforce is at stake, and the Return on Investment is so favorable (Show AGZA graphic).

And we have had an ongoing discussion with the leadership of the Oregon Landscape Contractors Association. I’ll finish with a quote from OLCA’s state president last year, Jesse Brough, who wrote the following to us:

“Thank you for your concern about our environment and the various ways the tools we use in our industry impact it. We reviewed and discussed your letter and the consensus was fairly unanimous. Everyone on the OLCA State Board (we are a mix of business owners, managers and industry-related vendor representatives) is excited about the developments in battery powered technology to run our equipment for many of the reasons you mentioned. We also look forward to seeing that technology further develop to the point that it could potentially replace gas powered equipment all together some day. Some of the board members that own companies run some crews with battery powered equipment already. We agreed that as technology continues to improve, battery powered equipment use will continue to become more common among landscape maintenance companies. If you’d like to further discuss ways OLCA could benefit your cause, please feel free to reach out anytime.”

Well that battery powered day has arrived, as you will hear a bit later in our testimony.