

# HOT TOPICS

## N.Y. green groups fight leaf blower laws

**Twenty-five complaints prompt controversial legislation in a New York city of 60,000.**

**WHITE PLAINS, N.Y.**—Landscape contractors from New York towns and villages in and around Westchester County are protesting tighter restrictions on leaf blowers.

In September, 357 members of various New York green industry association chapters, nurseries, and product manufacturers and distributors held a rally outside city hall here, hoping that mayor Sy Schulman would hear them out. Schulman gave them about a minute of his time, but promised to hear more at a later date.

Joe Tinelli of the New York Turf & Landscape Association, Inc. (NYTLA) and president of Tinelli Landscape Co., Yonkers, called the rally "massive, organized and diplomatic."

It was also an attention-getter. Tinelli was interviewed later by a reporter for the *New York Times*, and a local television station picked up the leaf blower story for the nightly news.

"We want a compromise," said Tinelli, who claims a recent ban on leaf blowers has been declared unconstitutional in the New York suburb of Peekskill.

"We've contacted an attorney who won the case on the grounds that it's unconstitutional to remove a tool that's essential to a trade," says Tinelli.

**Wake-up call**—Tinelli says he under-

stands how someone could become upset over excessive noise caused by unthinking operators, but he puts the blame on "the unlicensed contractors who attack a job with three or four leaf blowers" during early morning hours or dusk.

Given the small number of actual complaints about leaf blowers, many wonder whether the problem is real or imagined.



According to Tinelli, only 25 people in White Plains, a city of with a population of 60,000, filed complaints.

The NYTLA says New York green industry associations have spent thousands of dollars on public relations and made many requests for compromise, but are still not being heard. And according to Tinelli, Westchester County landscapers were promised a voice when it came time to draft legislation restricting leaf blower use, but were eventually ignored by legislators.

Contractors seek a compromise which would let them use leaf blowers year-round, but only during certain times of

the day.

Tinelli and others believe the solution is for product manufacturers to continue developing quieter machines, and for operators to use common sense when running leaf blowers.

"We're very aware of (the need for) noise reduction," says Tinelli. "This year, the New York Turf & Landscape Association has an education program dedicated to noise reduction."

**Manufacturer involvement**—Robin Pendergrast, spokesman for Echo, Inc., says the company has been giving dealers and end-users in more than 200 cities across the U.S. the information they need to operate blowers responsibly. The company's "Be Smart" campaign is meant to eliminate complaints caused by the inconsiderate use of leaf blowers.

According to Pendergrast, advancements in leaf-blower technology continue to result in quieter equipment.

"(Decibel) levels have gone down dramatically and will continue to do so," says Pendergrast.

Leaf blowers save time, water and money for at least three groups: the commercial user; city parks and recreation departments; and the homeowners who choose to pay to have their yards serviced. One industry estimate suggests that a clean-up job that takes six minutes with a leaf blower would take 32 minutes if done with a broom and a rake.

The leaf blower battle has been fought in some states since the late 1980s, but only seven cities have banned the tool completely.

The need for blowers during the grow-

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ing season could become more pressing as more cities ban yard waste from landfills. Such a ban is under consideration in the city of Yonkers, N.Y.

Westchester County contractors can now use their leaf blowers through November, but the issue will be back in the spring. Kevin Fish, executive officer of White Plains, was quoted as saying he believes some compromise will be reached, and he promised the contractors will get to tell their side of the story.

—Terry McIver

## Use blowers responsibly

**LAKE ZURICH, Ill.**—Echo's "Be Smart" campaign includes the following tips when using leaf blowers:

- Encourage workers to use lower—and quieter—throttle speeds; a full throttle is not always necessary. Try running it at half or three-quarter throttle.
- Avoid neighboring properties, open windows and other places where dust and noise might be a nuisance.
- Develop skill at using blower accessories like misters and nozzle extensions.
- Be polite by promptly cleaning up debris.
- According to the company, some employers tell workers to shut down blowers entirely when people pass by.

—T.M.

## Secret to water conservation: intelligent use

**SACRAMENTO, Calif.**—California's landscaping industry is responding to the state's fourth-driest year on record by using innovative water-conserving techniques borrowed from high-tech experts, says the California Landscape Contractors Association (CLCA).

"As an industry, we are much more concerned and educated about water conservation than we were five years ago," says James P. Everett, CLCA president. "The secret is intelligent use of water. There are practical ways to reduce water consumption by as much as 20 to 40 percent and still protect the vitality of landscapes."

Citing necessity as the mother of invention, Everett says the landscaping industry has responded to more than seven years of drought when landscaping was targeted with mandatory water rationing and limitations on outside watering.

"Healthy lawns and greenery were a convenient symbol to attack by those who thought landscaping was a luxury we

### California landscapers accept the challenge of using less water, but keeping the grass beautiful.

could do without," says Everett. "The fact is, landscaping offers benefits, such as fire protection and pollution control, that our state needs now more than ever before."

Examples of high-tech water monitoring cited by Everett: computer software, electronic sensing devices and satellite technology.

Besides CIMIS (California Irrigation Management Information System) weather stations that predict how much to water, the newest technique is "water auditing."

Information obtained in these audits provides landscapers with feedback on the design and installation of irrigation, thus enabling them to install more efficient systems.

"We analyze the performance of a landscape irrigation system," says Patrick Marion, past-chair of CLCA's Water Management Committee. "We look to see if the sprinkler heads are maladjusted or improperly spaced. Sometimes they are tilted so they are too low to effectively spray the grass."

Landscapers are also using water measuring devices like electronic sensors that detect ground moisture and computers to analyze audit results and develop irrigation schedules.

The CLCA was also involved in drafting AB 325, the Water Conservation in Landscaping Act, which took effect in 1991. It requires that all cities and counties have a written water conservation ordinance, unless they can show that one isn't needed.

"We see the act as a tool for assisting the development of new landscape installations," says Jon Ewing, owner of Landtrends, a San Diego-based landscape contracting firm.

### Video on Signature Award will be available from N.Y. Audubon Society

**WEST BEND, Wis.**—A video to promote and inform interested organizations about the requirements and benefits of achieving "Signature Award" status from the New York Audubon Society will be available soon.

The video, being produced by Epic of Wisconsin, features interviews and wildlife footage shot at the Signature Award-winning Collier's Reserve Golf Club in Naples, Fla.

"The geography and environment of every site is different," says N.Y. Audubon Society president Ron Dodson. "This program has guidelines and principles that we both have to follow, but there's a built-in flexibility so (developers) can reach their economic desires, and we can together reach our environmental desires."

For more information, write the society at: 46 Rarick Rd., Selkirk, NY 12158.



**Epic of Wisconsin, which shot an Audubon Society video, also produces a video magazine called 'Golf & Environment.'**