My name is Martin Donohoe. I am a resident of Lake Oswego, parent, and physician. I did my training at UCLA, Harvard, and Stanford, have written a textbook on public health and social justice, and lecture nationally and internationally on several topics related to environmental health.

I am here to ask this city council to ban gas-powered leaf blowers because of the significant risks they present to public health. Pollution from gas-powered blowers takes two forms: noise and air.

Noise pollution produces auditory and non-auditory effects. Decibel levels of gas leaf blowers exceed safe levels up to a radius of 800 feet and contribute to hearing loss, tinnitus, stress, and depression, due to the isolation consequent to hearing loss. Non-auditory effects include disturbance, annoyance, cognitive impairment (particularly in children), sleep disturbance, and hypertension. Occupational and environmental epidemiology studies have shown a higher prevalence and incidence of cardiovascular disease and mortality where there is chronic noise exposure.

In terms of air pollution, gas blowers produce high levels global-warming associated carbon dioxide, fine particulate matter, cancer-causing pollutants such as benzene, formaldehyde, and acetaldehyde, and toxic carbon monoxide. These emissions have adverse effects on brain and heart health and cause damage to developing fetuses. You have no doubt been made aware of the study showing emissions from a half hour’s use of a single gas blower is equivalent to the emissions from a Ford F150 Raptor driving from North Texas to Anchorage, Alaska. Pollutants can stay in the air for quite some time, especially when they do not have a chance to dissipate because of the repeated use of gas blowers, in some neighborhoods for hours per day on most days of the week.

As a physician, I see regularly the harm caused by air pollution, which, in addition to contributing to hospital admissions for heart and lung disease and stroke, causes 75,000 premature deaths each year in the United States – more than auto accidents. Air pollution causes asthma and impaired lung development and function in children, whose lungs are still developing and thus more vulnerable to pollution’s toxic effects. Asthmatics and those with emphysema experience higher medical costs and increased school and work absenteeism, as well as long-term risks associated with lung disease and early death. The medical and societal costs of pollution-related heart disease and cancers are, of course, also significant.

Gas blowers are terribly overused in Lake Oswego. Because people are either unable or unwilling to change, the “status quo bias,” it is incumbent upon this city council, for public health reasons, to step in and ban them. Gas blower use adversely affects our citizens, especially children and those with pre-existing chronic illnesses, as well as landscape workers, whose lungs are developing and who are particularly vulnerable to the toxic emissions.

Portland and Multnomah County have already planned to completely phase out gas-powered leaf blowers by 2028 and over 100 cities nationwide have enacted bans. Lake Oswego should do the same. We all have a right to breathe clean air and to be free from acoustic assaults in neighborhoods.

Thank you for listening.