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April 7, 2014

The Honorable Frank P. Petrone, Supervisor
Town of Huntington
100 Main Street
Huntington, NY 11743

Dear Supervisor Petrone,

As the Executive Director of Grassroots Environmental Education, an environmental health non-profit organization based here on Long Island, I am writing in support of restricting the use of gas leaf blowers in the Town of Huntington from May 15th to September 15th. I applaud you for your willingness to consider this commonsense and important public health initiative.

Grassroots Environmental Education's mission is to inform the public about the health risks of common environmental exposures. We strive to accomplish this using science-driven arguments for clean air, clean water and a safe food supply and for stricter regulation of chemical toxins. Many of our core programs have been recognized by the US Environmental Protection Agency and we have worked closely with state agencies, including the Departments of Health and Environmental Protection to protect human health and the environment from toxic environmental exposures. We strive to find solutions that will eliminate risk to people without causing economic hardship or degradation of the natural or built world.

Long Island has been designated a non-attainment area for air quality, meaning that we do not meet the air quality standards defined by the Federal Clean Air Act of 1970. Recognizing that this is primarily due to the Island's heavy vehicular traffic, it is imperative that local law makers do what they can to reduce this type of air pollution from other sources. Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) are key combustion byproducts and are highly polluting and harmful to human health. Regulation of the use of landscaping equipment that produces these pollutants would be helpful for our overall health as a region and especially to residents of the Town of Huntington.

Along with toxic volatile chemicals, gas leaf blowers release a particularly high level of particulate matter that is easily inhaled by people in the immediate and surrounding areas. Particulate matter is especially harmful for children, as their lung passages are narrow and this dangerous substance is easily trapped in deep lung tissue. People with asthma and other respiratory illnesses as well as the elderly are also at higher risk.

Our organization has done extensive research on the ability of pesticides to adhere to particular types of soil. Leaf blowers create a lot of dust (especially when it is dry) and send these soil particles into the air and into people's homes through screens and window and door frames. This translocation of lawn pesticides into people's homes is another public health issue associated with the widespread use of blowers.

Although there are many other harmful effects associated with gas leaf blowers, including their impact on wildlife and their considerable contribution to noise pollution, lastly I would like to address the vulnerability of our children. Children are uniquely vulnerable to a wide range of health effects from environmental exposures due to their developing physiology and natural behavior. Pound for pound, they eat more, drink more and breathe more than adults, so they receive proportionally more of any toxins found in food, water and air. Their immune systems are still developing so they lack adult defenses against toxins. Finally, children spend more time outside – particularly in midday when pollutant levels are highest. While outside, children play close to the ground on lawns where residues of chemicals, especially particulate matter and pesticides, are often found. Play habits and typical hand-to-mouth behavior increases their risk for accidental ingestion of toxins.

We applaud the leadership of the dedicated volunteers and officials of the Town of Huntington for putting forward this important public health policy, and appreciate this opportunity to share our concerns with you.

Sincerely,

Patricia J. Wood
Executive Director

PJW:nl

cc: Hon. Mark Cuthbertson
Hon. Susan Berland
Hon. Tracy Edwards
Hon. Eugene Cook

Hon. Frank P. Petrone, Supervisor
Hon. Mark Cuthbertson Councilman
Hon. Susan Berland, Councilwoman
Hon. Tracy Edwards, Councilwoman
Hon. Eugene Cook Councilman

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