

Silent Spring?

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C. L. Cook -PEJ News - When Rachel Carson finished her seminal work, 'Silent Spring' in 1962, she could have no way of knowing the literal irony her title would hold for we living in this green and pleasant Victoria in 2005. - {lex}

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C. L. Cook

Special to [StreetNewz](#)

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[This article is taken from the June/July issue of Victoria's own, StreetNewz newspaper, now on the street. lex.]

May money from the sale of this newspaper be used towards peace, and pass through healing hands.

Carlson's book was a bellwether warning against the unregulated use of pesticides and the effects these would have on the natural world. The silence she alludes to is the devastating reduction of birds due to the eradication of their insect food source. Thus, the absent bird songs of Spring humans have listened to and been inspired by forever.

True to her prediction, the avian populations of North America and beyond are severely stressed, their numbers overall reduced by half in the last decade. But there is no silence here in Spring. Victoria, the renowned 'City of Gardens' rings, as I write, with the machine song of lawn-mowers, weed-whackers, and leaf-blowers.

Beyond the racket, these devices present a further threat to the remaining natural world we all wish to live amid. In California, where air quality is a pressing concern, opposition to gas-powered garden appliances has focussed concerns on the environmental costs of allowing their unfettered access to the air-shed.

In 1999, Zero Air Pollution LA, (ZAPLA), a grassroots organization working for a cleaner, 'NoBlow' environment conducted public opinion surveys to elicit comment on the neighbourhood scourge. They report: Results of Survey99 show

-75% of participants would like to see more restrictions on blowers, and

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-62% would like to see blowers banned.

-64% of participants changed their own routines sometime within a typical week due to the use of blowers.

-56% of this group do so often or daily.

-70% of all participants state that blowers in their neighbourhood disturb them.

The overwhelming unpopularity of these destruction machines is not new in California. As far back as 1978, the well-heeled residents of Beverly Hills banned leaf-blower use within that jurisdiction. Others too have fought to eliminate the obnoxious machines, and ZAPLA says they are continually receiving requests from neighbourhoods wishing to follow suit.

In 1991, Santa Monica, California [drafted their own law](#) to deal with the menace and where quickly followed by: Albany, Bakersfield, Belvedere, Carmel, Coronado, Davis, Del Mar, Downey, Hermosa Beach, Hillsborough, Malibu, Newport Beach, Ojai, Palm Desert, Palm Springs, and others.

The City of Victoria convened a committee in 2002 to address noise pollution, and leaf blowers were included in the area of concern. They announced then the creation of a [City Noise Map](#), to be completed by Wakefield Acoustics Ltd. But, a search of the City website reveals no initiatives to address air quality issues created by these machines. To date, the noise bylaws have been ineffective, as any stroll through local neighbourhoods will attest, in curtailing the use of leaf blowers and other highly polluting two-stroke engine gardening equipment.

As with most things, it's a political dilemma. The users, retail sellers, and manufacturers of these tools oppose laws threatening their businesses. But, as ZAPLA points out, many of these opponents to regulation do not live in the community, and may be more concerned with their own economic interests. Landscapers and professional gardeners are especially vulnerable to bans and restrictions, and argue their business survival is imperilled, but there are, ZAPLA notes, alternatives to the din and polluting status quo. They recommend:

??blower use can be eliminated or reduced by use of rake and broom, mulching mowers, frequency of mowing grass, electric (or battery operated) vacuums, and changes in landscape design and maintenance routine. Routine changes could include edging only every other week, and collecting grass clippings in a mower bag, or using mowers that leave clippings on top of, or push them down into, the lawn.?

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What must be considered here, as in all civic issues, is the quality of life within the community. Do you wish your Spring mornings and weekends resound with the racket of ?industrialized? lawn and garden maintenance? Or is it possible we move away from environmentally detrimental practices towards common sense alternatives that harm none?

Rachel Carson is long gone now, but the people working in her spirit at rachelcarson.org remind of her parting words to us:

"The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction."

Chris Cook hosts [Gorilla Radio](#), a weekly public affairs program, broad/webcast from CFUV Radio at the University of Victoria, Canada. You can check out the [GR Blog here](#).