

Banning gas-powered power equipment will drive up costs and destroy jobs in Washington State

The push by some lawmakers to electrify every element of daily life does not make sense and in most cases artificially drives up costs and destroys jobs.

By Mark Harmsworth, Director, Center for Small Business

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Key Findings

1. House Bill 1868 would ban the sale of new outdoor gas-powered equipment after January 1, 2026, that is rated at 25 horsepower or less.
2. House Bill 1868 will drive up the cost of lawn maintenance equipment for everyone.
3. Electric outdoor equipment has limited capacity and power compared to a gas powered equivalent.
4. Landscaping and commercial companies would have a significant capital expenditure as they replace aging gas-powered equipment.
5. Landscaping companies may need to lay off workers to offset the additional costs.
6. The bill would create a sales tax exemption for electric yard equipment.
7. Local government is exempt during times of emergencies.
8. A grant program would reimburse local governments for replacing gas-powered equipment. Private citizens, however, would bear the full cost.

Introduction

House Bill 1868 (HB 1868) would prohibit engine exhaust and evaporative emissions from new outdoor power equipment.¹ The rules would apply to gas-powered equipment produced on or after January 1, 2026, rated at 25 horsepower or lower. The ban would include most outdoor

yard equipment and many popular riding lawnmowers.²

The bill would exempt government agencies during an emergency. HB 1868 would create a grant program to cover the cost to local government of replacing working condition gas-powered equipment. Private citizens, however, would bear the full cost.

Private citizens would also be subject to the law's harsh penalties, which include jailtime or a significant fine.

A sales tax exemption would be created for electric yard equipment, funded by transferring funds from the climate commitment account.

Retailers would be encouraged to add information stickers to gas-powered equipment and the sales tax exemption on electric equivalent equipment.

Negative impacts on small business and consumers

Similar to a Seattle law passed last year, HB 1868 would significantly harm consumers and the landscaping industry requiring purchase of new equipment that is less powerful and more expensive.³

First, the cost of replacing aging yard equipment for consumers and yard maintenance companies will be expensive. Secondly, while a consumer would be able to operate yard equipment and complete the task in a relatively

1 "Reducing emissions from outdoor power equipment", House Bill 1868, accessed January 2024, <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2023-24/Pdf/Bills/House%20Bills/1868.pdf?q=20231211143833>.

2 "100 Series Lawn Tractors", John Deere, accessed January 2024, <https://www.deere.com/en/mowers/lawn-tractors/100-series/>.

3 "Seattle City Council bans gas-powered leaf blowers", Mark Harmsworth, Washington Policy Center, accessed January 2024, <https://www.washingtonpolicy.org/publications/detail/seattle-city-council-bans-gas-powered-leaf-blowers>.

short period of time on one battery charge, a yard maintenance company would need multiple batteries charged each day and potentially several pieces of duplicate equipment to complete the same work it does today with one can of gas.

As an example, a typical gas-powered riding lawn mower costs \$2,000 to \$3,000 less than a less well-equipped, battery powered version.

Benjamin Oostra, owner of Parkview Landscaping summarizes the harmful impact that HB 1868 would have on his small landscaping company.

“This bill fails to consider that the homeowner that occasionally uses lawn equipment may be ready to make the switch to electric equipment but not a landscaping business. An individual may use their equipment for perhaps an hour a week versus landscape crews using equipment up to 40 hours a week. Our business currently has \$611,000 (MRSP) value of gas-powered small tools that are used daily. This proposed legislation would mean we would have to scrap all that equipment value and buy \$1,616,000 (MRSP) of like-for-like electric lawn equipment. If all our gas-powered equipment had to be replaced with electric versions at the business’s expense, I would probably close the landscaping company because this cost could not be absorbed and let go of our 25 employees.

More importantly, creating a long term environmental and cost analysis of lithium mining compared to gas production should be studied. This bill (HB 1868) seems to be forcing something prematurely that should remain an individual and economic decision. Some may think consumer markets are ready to make the switch. I have not even given electric equipment a thought because of the current benefits of using gas equipment.”

the difference would be similar to a vacuum cleaner compared to an air conditioner. To the average listener, there is not much difference. In addition, to some listeners the piercing whine of an electric blower operating at a higher pitch, shriller and more offensive than a gas-powered motor.

Policy recommendation

Voluntary choices made through the free market should drive the adoption of electric yard maintenance equipment when it makes sense both economically and functionally to do so. An electric lawnmower is one solution for smaller yards, and these are becoming increasingly popular, but this tool is ineffective for extensive, prolonged use or use on large areas.

Using the power of legislation to force behavior would increase costs and remove consumer choice, particularly affecting low-income citizens who can least afford the newer more expensive options.

Conclusion

HB 1868 represents a top-down mandated policy that will symbolically please certain political activists but would have little impact on the perceived environmental problems it claims to solve. The policy imposed by HB 1868 would have particular harmful impact on small businesses and homeowners. It would increase costs and destroy jobs in return for an empty gesture that would provide almost no benefit to the environment.

Noise and pollution impacts

Yard maintenance equipment often garners the wrath of neighbors as early morning yard cleanups can be noisy, but banning gas powered versions of popular yard tools would not reduce noise pollution significantly.

As an example, a typical commercial grade gas powered leaf blower emits about 70 decibels of sound, compared to an electric blower which emits about 61 decibels. On the decibel scale that is technically about twice as loud, but in reality,

Mark Harmsworth is the
Director of the Center for
Small Business.

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