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The Green Truth about Lawn Mowing

Did you know that a standard gas lawnmower can emit the same amount of common air pollutants in one hour as driving a new car almost 500 kilometres?

Or think about this: a gas-powered lawnmower running for an hour puts out about the same amount of smog-forming emissions as 40 new automobiles running for an hour.

Or this: according to Statistics Canada, gas-powered lawn equipment releases about 80,000 tonnes of emissions in Canada every year, using 151 million litres of gas.

Pollution and greenhouse gas reduction efforts often focus primarily on the automobile, but in fact the small two-stroke gas engines found in lawnmowers, trimmers, leaf blowers and chainsaws are a significant source of greenhouse gas and smog-forming emissions. Environment Canada estimates emissions from non-road sources such as lawn and garden equipment comprise 20 per cent of all smog produced by mobile sources in Canada. Additionally, more than half of Canadians with a small lot are using the wrong lawnmower for the size of their lawn. For instance, using a gas-powered lawnmower for a small city lot contributes to unnecessary emissions, as the lawn could easily be mowed using a push reel mower causing no harm to the environment.

For cosmetic reasons, homeowners often mow their lawns too frequently and cut the grass too short. Setting your mower blade at a high setting retains moisture in the lawn and prevents unnecessary watering and mowing, saving water and reducing air pollution. And in times of little rain, either don't mow, or keep the blade very high - tall grass is better protected from drought. Keeping your mower blade sharp also makes for a healthier lawn. And if the grass is long overdue for cutting, don't cut it all at once. Never cut more than one-third of its length on any one day.

To help Canadians along the path to more eco-friendly lawn care, The Clean Air Foundation and Home Depot partner each year to offer the 'Mow Down Pollution' event (www.cleanairfoundation.org/mowdownpollution). The program is designed to encourage and reward Canadians for permanently retiring their older, higher-polluting gasoline-powered lawn equipment. Canadians can bring in their old gas mower, trimmer, hedge trimmer, blower or chainsaw to any Home Depot location across the country during the event and receive a rebate on the purchase of an eco-friendly alternative. And the program ensures that your old lawn equipment is recycled responsibly.

This year the event was held from April 23 to May 3; and over this period Canadians returned more than 8,800 lawnmowers – amounting to a reduction of approximately 340 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions! Since Mow Down Pollution's inception in 2001, 26,800 gas lawnmowers and trimmers have been retired and permanently recycled - a reduction of 748 tonnes of greenhouse gas and smog-forming emissions. Of

the 178 Home Depot locations across Canada, the Fredericton location had the highest increase in mowers returned over last year, with 41 mowers brought in for recycling and replacement.

So, what are the 'green' mower options if your gas mower is old and needs replaced? The most eco-friendly and zero carbon solution to lawn mowing is the human-powered push reel mower. These are great for smaller, flat lots and for those who like their lawn-mowing efforts to be a good workout!

Another worthy alternative to the gas mower is an electric model (corded or cordless). The energy usage (hence emissions) for new electric mowers is very low, and the typical operating cost is only about \$5.00 per year. The added benefit is that the noise level is about half of their gas-powered counterparts.

If you aren't yet sure what to replace your gas mower with; or if you want to wait until next year's Mow Down Pollution event so your mower can be recycled; why not consider hiring out your mowing to a gas-free mowing company? There is one such operation in Fredericton called *Gas Free Grass Cutters* (for a free appraisal call 472-6085). And for an environmental approach in caring for your trees and shrubs, consult Fredericton's *Treecologic* (www.treecologic.ca).

Ecologically responsible lawn care is not just about eliminating cosmetic pesticides. In addition to that, let's move to the next stage this summer and reduce the pollution and emissions we generate from our lawn care equipment and practices.

Sonya Hull is a local consultant and the Project Manager for the City of Fredericton's environmental programs, and she is looking to replace her old gas mower as soon as possible! For more information on the City's green programs go to www.greenmattersfredericton.com; and www.greenshopsfredericton.com.