



**THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®** *of the Fairfax Area*

**Wanda Wastewatcher Revisited**

## **The Air You Breathe -- Part I**

**by Judy Prochko, E.Q. Committee**

**During the summer of 1993, the Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee was finalizing its study of ways to bring the metropolitan area into compliance with the Clean Air Act of 1990. Our local League Environmental Quality committee met during the same time to review the evolving recommendations. One of the proposals was that citizens should be required to refrain from using lawn mowers and other garden equipment on high pollution days. We shook our heads in disbelief and wondered how this could be enforced. Would there be a lawn mower policeman on every block? How could lawn maintenance companies manage to stay in business? How would the public know when an ozone alert day was in effect? As a committee, we felt this was an unworkable element of the recommendations. When the final report was released, it was recommended that episodic bans on lawn and garden equipment use be implemented on a voluntary basis, which means that they will be all but forgotten...but, should they?**

**Unlike automobiles, lawn care equipment is rarely equipped with emission controls. Consequently, lawn mowers combined with other gas-powered tools contribute a disproportionate amount of air pollution. They are part of the problem and, therefore, need to be taken seriously in efforts to improve our local air quality. Just because leadership from the State on clean air initiatives is stalled in a legal quagmire does not mean that, individually, we cannot move forward in efforts to improve the air we breathe. The following are some suggestions to consider.**

**The "greenest" alternative, of course, is to convert your existing lawn to forest or meadow. Allowing it to "go natural" would not only eliminate the need for a lawn mower but also the other demands of lawn care such as watering, fertilizing and even leaf raking. Just think, you could spend this time doing "fun" things unless, of course, caring for your lawn is your "fun" thing.**

**If "going natural" does not appeal to you, there are some other alternatives. Last summer, out of curiosity, I strolled the aisles of lawn mowers for sale at a local hardware store to see what options were available. In addition to the familiar gas-powered lawn mowers, there were electric and old-fashioned reel mowers. I also understand that there are mowers that use compressed natural gas and others that are battery driven.**

**Electric mowers have been on the market for several decades. They are less noisy than gas-powered models and are more benign because of the pollution controls in place at energy plants. Local air quality would improve if more households would switch to electric mowers.**

Now for the "reel" solution! Most of us remember pushing a clunky reel mower until the advent of power mowers. Interestingly enough, sales of rotary mowers have grown phenomenally in recent years--yes, "reely". Since California enacted tougher emission standards for lawn and garden equipment, Southern California accounts for a third of this new market. If the thought of returning to a reel mower is totally unthinkable to you, think again. They are much improved. A top-of-the-line reel mower weighs in at about 25 pounds due to improved alloys and ball-bearing wheels. Using human power, they could give you a workout doing something functional rather than driving to the gym or an aerobics class. Reel mowers are also the safest alternative because power mowers send many people to the emergency room each year with missing fingers, toes and eyeballs. Compared to the deafening roar of a gas-powered mower, the "snip-snip" sound that emanates from them is pleasant to the ear...both yours and your neighbors.

So, the next time you are in the market for a lawn mower, consider the options and opt for cleaner air and less noise...right in your own backyard.

*ECOTIP: Surprise! Low tech solutions are not always more environmentally friendly. For instance, it takes an electric razor a year to consume as much power as it takes to heat a week's supply of water for lather shaving.*