

Published October 12th, 2011

## Some Answers are Blowing in the Wind

Cathy Dausman



Peter Kendall helps Charles Correll don safety equipment prior to leaf blower test Photos Cathy Dausman

Sophia Aguilera and Charles Correll, students in Barbara Denny's AP Environmental Science class at Miramonte High School, have taken their work outside.

Volunteer work at the Chabot Space and Science Center prompted Aguilera, a senior, to enroll in Denny's class. She says she wants to major in the environmental sciences in college. Correll is a junior with a background in public speaking and debate. Recently Denny asked Aguilera and Correll to test leaf blower noise and particulate pollution at their school. They conducted two studies, a week apart. The first measured the noise levels of a gas powered and electric leaf blower. The second week, the level of "micro particles" blown into the air was measured. That test was completed using only the gas leaf blower.

Originally, Denny was approached by Katharine Barrett, the wife of Berkeley professor Reginald Barrett, who asked if Denny could have students measure the effects of leaf blowers.

Having neither a decibel or particulate meter, or a leaf blower, Denny was referred to Lawrence Hall of Science's Tony Marks-Block, who provided an air quality sampler (aka particulate meter), and Orinda Quiet's Peter and Susan Kendall, who loaned leaf blowers and a sound meter.

Denny feels the study reinforces her course material on how people sharing common areas can affect those areas, and how governments manage those commons. She sees the study as a chance to "examine what will happen in Orinda as it pertains to leaf blowers and their possible regulation."

Orinda Quiet is lobbying for a cutback in the use of leaf blowers. "I am not taking a position on the issue," says Denny, "I just want the students to generate data."

The students, however, took sides. Correll and Aguilera spoke before the October 4 Orinda City Council meeting to voice their concerns over what Correll termed the city's "dangerous love affair" with blowers. Test results showed that while noise readings were within manufacturer's specs, how the blower gets used changes the noise level perception. During the particulate study, Denny noted the "particles stayed high" throughout the time the blower was on. While test results may not make their way into scientific journals, they certainly ruffled a few dead leaves.



From left: Tony Marks-Block, Sophia Aguilera and Barbara Denny

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