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# OPINION

## Vital Role to Care for the Good of Sexuality

### Knowledge helpful, not harmful

BY MICHAEL SCHUENEMEYER

It isn't that we aren't getting an education about sexuality; the question is who is doing the educating. Although parents and caregivers are and should be the primary sexuality educators for our children, we learn about sexuality from other sources, too.

Media and advertising is one such source. The marketers of the world are likely counting on members of the religious community to quash age appropriate, comprehensive sexuality education, so that the values in their ads can effectively shape how we make decisions.

In fact, increasingly marketers use sexually charged ads with images that communicate



messages about self-worth, body image and what is important in relationships. However, the more educated you and I are about sex and sexuality, the more difficult it is for marketers to successfully exploit and distort our sense of self, body and relationships for the sake of making a sale.

Growing up in a Christian home, I was taught that sexuality is a good gift from God. I've always had the sense that my sexuality is a good and integral part of who I am. As a sexuality educator of the Our Whole Lives curriculum, I believe we are called to enrich our lives by expressing our sexuality in ways that enhance human wholeness and fulfillment, and express love, commitment, delight and plea-

sure.

To take good care of this good gift, each of us needs to have accurate information about sexuality and to be grounded in the healthy values of self-worth, sexual health, and what it means to be responsible, just and inclusive.

Developing a healthy sexuality cannot happen in a vacuum. We cannot expect to acquire accurate information, develop strong values and have the capacity make healthy and responsible decisions by being complacent. To do so is to put the good gift of sexuality into the hands of those who are more concerned about selling their products than what creates health and wholeness.

Faith leaders and faith communities have a vital role to play by encouraging the creation of safe spaces for people of all ages to engage in age appropri-

ate, comprehensive sexuality education. Knowledge about human sexuality is helpful, not harmful. Every individual has the right to accurate information about sexuality and to have their questions answered.

A few years ago a colleague and I met informally with a handful of researchers and officials at the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland to talk about comprehensive sexuality education. We shared our vision and experience in doing this work in our houses of worship and other settings. We talked about the guidelines for age appropriate sexuality education developed by the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States. It didn't take long before they were talking about themselves and their children.

Some in that meeting indi-

cated they had had to figure it out for themselves; a journey they often found lonely, difficult and fraught with misinformation. That was not what they wanted for their children, but in spite of their own medical training, they were keenly in tune with the challenges of providing good and accurate information to their children, desiring to instill in them the values for making good, healthy and responsibly decisions. That is what comprehensive sexuality education is all about - honoring and valuing the good gift our sexuality, and equipping one another with the information we need to make healthy decisions that impact our entire lives.

*Michael Schuenemeyer is executive for Health and Wholeness Advocacy in Justice Ministries for the United Church of Christ.*

## These Machines Senselessly Endanger Your Health

### The Leaf Blower Divide

BY SARAH ANDERSON

When new neighbors moved in next door, I didn't hold off long before broaching the Big Question.

Even though we live in Washington, D.C., this had nothing to do with politics. For me, neighborly harmony hinges on where folks stand on this divide: leaf blower vs. rake.

You see, I'm one of those otherwise calm individuals who goes totally bonkers at the sound of a leaf blower. It would be different if this infernal racket served some useful purpose. When I go to the dentist, the drill doesn't make my blood boil. I accept that without it, my teeth would rot.

When a leaf blower cranks up, I can find no logical justification for my suffering. In a recent article for AlterNet, former Consumer Reports editor Cliff Weathers presents a frightening litany of their multiple hazards.

"Leaf blowers don't just blow



away leaves and lawn clippings," Weathers wrote. "Their 180- to 200-mph air output blasts away topsoil, microbial life forms, animal waste, allergic fungi, spores, herbicides, pesticides, and even heavy metals such as arsenic, mercury, and lead."

That's gross and scary, but the worst part is what

companies have worked to block anti-leaf blower efforts. A favorite tactic: Make it seem like opponents are all extremely rich, and possibly even racist. With low-income Latinos making up a large share of landscaping workers, these are sensitive charges.

It's true that wealthy white enclaves were among the first to ban blowers. In California,

ers cites a competition the Los Angeles Department of Power and Water organized that pitted a grandmother with a rake and broom against a professional landscaper with a leaf blower. Granny gave him a run for his money.

Detailed analysis of the employment impacts of blower bans is hard to find and enforcement

median in Florida and Texas.

Nationwide, the areas with the highest concentration of landscaping and groundskeeping jobs include some of the hoity-toitist holiday and retirement spots. No. 1: Nantucket Island and Martha's Vineyard, where the Obama family vacationed this year.

If a critical mass of these communities banned leaf blowers, it would transform the landscaping industry away from reliance on machines that are senselessly endangering health and welfare — especially for the workers who operate them.

In response to my Big Question, our new neighbors laughed and assured me I didn't need to worry about which side they were on. This was a relief. But in a city that restricts leaf blower hours but hasn't banned them, I'm still dreading the fall season.

As in past years, I'll probably hear three or four machines blasting within a few blocks of my yard, while I — quietly raking — try to maintain my sanity.

*OtherWords columnist Sarah Anderson directs the Global Economy Project at the Institute for Policy Studies.*

*This toxic cocktail of engine emissions and dust particulates can exacerbate allergies and asthma in children and adults, and aggravate acute pulmonary disorders.*

— Cliff Weathers, AlterNet former Consumer Reports editor

these gizmos do to your health. "This toxic cocktail of engine emissions and dust particulates can exacerbate allergies and asthma in children and adults, and aggravate acute pulmonary disorders," Weathers explained.

The American Lung Association says we should all steer clear of gasoline-powered blowers, the most popular type. So why are they still in use?

For decades now, manufactur-

ers and many landscaping Carmel and Beverly Hills made the move back in the 1970s. But in most of the country, the higher-income set continues to drive demand for these dangerous beasts.

Industry lobbyists downplay the risks while claiming that regulations will lead to higher costs and fewer jobs. But good old non-motorized tools are cheaper than leaf blowers and, according to several tests, nearly as fast.

In his AlterNet article, Weath-

is tough. But it's clear that in California, where about 20 cities, including Los Angeles, have banned blowers, the landscaping industry has hardly collapsed.

About 103,000 Californians are employed in this industry, and landscapers make up a larger share of the workforce there than in other big states like Texas, New York, and Illinois. California's median wage in this business is \$13.75 per hour, more than 20 percent higher than the