

## AN ACCOUNT OF AN AGZA GREEN ZONE<sup>®</sup> TRAINING WORKSHOP AT EASTSIDE UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT (ESUSD)

(San Jose, CA — March 03, 2020) By Audrey Wen

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### American Green Zone Alliance Certification for a Second Eastside Union School District High School, Evergreen High

**San Jose, CA** — I thought I understood the difficulties going in. I did not.

As I stepped into one of the portables of East Side Union High School District (ESUHSD) after meeting Dan Mabe, the Founder and CEO of AGZA, and Roger Silveira, the Director of Facilities, Maintenance & Operations at ESUHSD, I thought nothing more about the training workshop I was attending than an informational session for me to further my understanding of the health risks of gas equipment.

Mr. Mabe started off the presentation with his personal attachment to this initiative. I learned that he has dedicated himself to changing the lawn equipment industry to become more clean, efficient, and sustainable since 2006. AGZA has developed a true behavior modification certification that is tried and true. The current movement towards alternatives to gas is largely facilitated by AGZA and Mr. Mabe's dedication. In conjunction to his story, Mr. Mabe delved into the detrimental exhaust emitted from gas equipment through sobering statistics and video clips. Some of his audience was engaged, while others appeared to rather be attending a driver's ed class.

Dan gave numerous examples of other AGZA Certified Green Zones, some covering over 120 acres of "serviceable" property. These certifications require the phasing out of all two-stroke equipment for "routine" maintenance but can score higher the more gas operations are phased out during the process. Dan coordinated with Roger to have most of their new battery electric gear staged inside the classroom.



*Pictured above is STIHL'S 36V, AP battery electric line up. STIHL'S AP line has been used in AGZA Certified Green Zones for nearly a decade.*

As the workers pitched in on issues of the battery powered equipment through their experiences, Mr. Mabe under Mr. Silveira's watchful eye calmly explained necessary cleaning and usage measures to ensure optimal usage efficiency and lifespan potential of batteries and tools.

With the first ESUSD AGZA Green Zone (Yorba Buena High School), there were a few issues with acclimating to the new technology. The challenge with the switch in equipment came from the workers' treatment of the new tools as their old gas ones and their expectations for them to work the same. One aspect of AGZA certification is a support program to assist all grounds maintenance workers in their transition to more environmentally friendly and energy efficient lawn equipment. One gentleman who had been part of the crew who first used the electric gear stated that he did not want the certification to be a blame program but rather a support program; Mr. Mabe explained there will need to be some modifications in the overall approach when phasing out internal combustion operations. Nonetheless, I understood where the man was coming from. Despite their initial efforts to adopt the new equipment, the results were mixed but overall the electric equipment had been handling the campus workload for over a year now.

I understood that asking an entire industry of gas users to make the switch to a completely foreign technology to meet their same end was challenging, especially so because the workers did not want to be told what to do but rather shown a credible, different way to do it. Being further told how to do their work by people seemingly oblivious to their concerns further distances the gas maintenance industry from the movement that expects rapid change. The impacts on distributors, dealers, and the grounds maintenance industry who are heavily dependent on fossil fuels to power their industry are recognized, but they can be managed with the education and professional guidance offered by AGZA to help navigate the changes being asked of them.

As Mr. Mabe touched on the noise reduction that battery powered equipment would bring to the crew, I overheard two men near me discussing their opinions on the noise. Both acknowledged going about their daily rounds without any form of ear protection. I couldn't help but react in concerned shock. That was exposures of up to 100 dB of noise at the ear for hours a day, hundreds of days a year, and who knows how many years.

*Pictured here are more STHIL 36V AP tools and a Mean Green, 60" ZTR mower. Mean Green Mowers have been used in large scale AGZA Certified Green Zone projects for over seven years.*



Through that little snippet, I realized that the workers were already accustomed to what they had. Getting used to new equipment will definitely be a challenge for some and easier for others who are more receptive.

Nearing the end of the workshop, everyone stepped out of the room to take a look at the mower. As Mr. Mabe shared improvements of the new mower that would be arriving soon, the men were clearly divided into two groups. The first consisted of those who were actively crowding around the mower and displaying genuine excitement at the improvements that would be coming their way. The second stood in the shade to evade the sun with unconvinced and unsure attitudes. Just as I noticed this divide, a member of the first group walked over to someone from the second group. He analogized the gas equipment to an ex-girlfriend and the battery powered equipment to a new girlfriend. While the ex may have been the right match at that time, you are no longer together for a reason. The new girlfriend will never be the same as the old one, so you need to adapt to a different partner. In current times, we must consider how to preserve the environment and eliminate excessive gas emissions. Within this year, smog-forming emissions from small off-road engines will exceed those of passenger cars, and those numbers are only predicted to steadily rise according to the California Air Resources Board. It is time to acknowledge this prevalent issue that has flown under the radar for too long.

The workshop concluded quite successfully considering its rocky start. As it had progressed, more and more workers gained faith in this transition. This is truly attributable to AGZA's persistent efforts and its collaboration with the ESUHSD. Without Mr. Silveira's willingness to embrace change in the district, the project would not have progressed to its current stage. This ambitious journey must acquire full-on participation from governmental agencies, non-profits, and the private sector in order to reach a stage where we no longer have to worry about the issues of gas powered lawn equipment to our public wellbeing and environment. Governmental agencies address gas equipment usage to a certain degree, but do not share the sense of urgency that AGZA stands by. AGZA will continue to facilitate the prudent and responsible implementation of battery electric, and people powered operations over gas, but it may take a combination of regulations from those at the top and grassroots efforts to make significant changes. The hope is that the current gas powered industry will reasonably embrace and implement cleaner technologies at a pace that will help governmental agencies reach their clean air attainment goals on time.

On the car ride back home, I contemplated Mr. Mabe's words in addition to what I had seen firsthand at the workshop. Even now, I don't dare say I understand all the difficulties of this project. All I know is that everyone must come together to combat this issue - this is no small matter. I hope that change and acceptance is imminent.

***Audrey Wen** is a junior attending Dougherty Valley High School in California. She is passionate about bringing light to the harms of gas powered lawn equipment and is eager to bring about their phase-out. Audrey created [Debunk2031.org](http://Debunk2031.org) to combat the predicted growth of smog-forming emissions due to small off-road engines, specifically lawn maintenance gear. During her free time, she enjoys crafting and playing the Chinese violin.*

