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ANTI-IDLING LAW WOULD HELP STATE

Air-quality-related issues have been in the news in Vermont this year like never before. Many of us have seen repeated stories in the media on global warming, the International Paper tire burn, and Vermont's lawsuit against the Environmental Protection Agency for more stringent federal regulation of greenhouse gas emissions.

Unnecessary vehicle idling is a serious air quality issue, yet the awareness of vehicle idling in Vermont and the United States today can be equated to that of the awareness of tobacco smoke 50 years ago.

Few of us think anything of letting our vehicles idle in non-traffic situations: vehicles left running as people go into convenience stores, post offices, banks, etc. Truckers leave their rigs idling for hours at a time as they make deliveries or sit at construction sites. School buses idle on and on at schools and athletic events, emitting a nasty brew of chemicals that leave children and asthmatics especially vulnerable.

According to the Ameri-

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can Lung Association, idling is a significant factor in causing respiratory illness, and the EPA states that idling wastes fuel and causes engine damage — hitting us all right in the pocketbook. What's more, an idling vehicle runs much less efficiently, accelerating carbon dioxide emissions that contribute to climate change.

There has been a glimmer of hope, however. Legislators in the Vermont Senate and House have submitted diesel idle-reduction bills in the last few years and will be resubmitting them in 2007. Thus far these bills have failed to get out of committee. Despite the fact that they are not very restrictive — the proposed five minute idling limit has many exceptions including in any traffic situation, and when temperature is under 32 degrees — certain committees have resisted them.

We can do something about this. With the heightened awareness of air quality, and the fact that Rhode Island joined Connecticut, Massachusetts and New Hampshire by enacting a diesel idling law this year, the time has come for Vermont to do the right thing in 2007. This can only happen if we let our legislators who represent us know that we want an idling law enacted. Find your legislators at www.leg.state.vt.us/ and take a few minutes to write them an e-mail, especially in advance of the new session that starts in January. They can be very responsive to their constituents.

If Vermont enacts a diesel idle-reduction law, then what? How is it enforced? At first, enforcement will be limited, since law enforcement will consider an idle-reduction law less of a priority. Governing bodies and citizens alike will have to make police aware of the seriousness of extended school bus and truck idling. In the meantime, having a law can yield immediate benefits in certain situations. Parents and school officials can notify police of

What is your experience?

How would an anti-idling law hurt or benefit you as a traveler? Let us know at letters@bfp.burlingtonfreepress.com.

idling school buses, emphasizing that there is a law. The same can apply to truck idling. Ultimately, an idle-reduction law can be publicized with an educational campaign similar to the "Click It or Ticket" safety belt and "Don't Burn Vermont" illegal trash burning campaigns.

Awareness and then action on all aspects of achieving better air quality — from tobacco smoke to vehicle emissions — has, and will always be, a slow process. Let's begin to change the damaging and wasteful habit of idling by getting a Vermont idle-reduction law enacted. Our health, and our planet's health, depends on it.

Wayne F. Michaud of Bristol is coordinator of the Idle-Free VT campaign. Visit Idlefreevt.org.