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By CYRUS LEVESQUE

BRISTOL — A recently enacted law restricting idling by school buses was the product of years of work by many different groups, from Jericho schoolchildren to representatives of the American Lung Association. In addition, one relative newcomer to the public policy world also helped get the bill passed. Advocacy by the Bristol-based group Idle-Free VT made a difference, backers of the bill say.

The act bans school buses from running their engines while parked on school grounds, except under special circumstances and goes into affect in the coming school year.

For Wayne Michaud of Bristol, founder and director of Idle-Free VT, the work has been rewarding. "I and other lobbyists and legislators have worked hard to get the law passed," Michaud said. "This is the first state of Vermont idling law that's been enacted, and that's pretty big news."

Sen. Claire Ayer, D-Weybridge, said that Idle-Free VT's efforts were helpful in getting the bill S.13 passed this year, unlike a similar bill that she introduced in January 2006, which never made it to a vote.

"They gave me a lot of information and they worked closely with the American Lung Association," Ayer said.

Idle-Free VT began with the work of Michaud to combat unnecessary vehicle idling for a number of reasons. Reducing idling saves fuel, cuts greenhouse gas emissions, reduces the causes of some respiratory illnesses (including asthma), reduces damage to engine components and curbs noise pollution.

"It's a great law for Vermont," Michaud said.

The group is new and really still getting started. Michaud founded

the group about a year ago and it now has six members, he said.

"It's not really a far-reaching organization," he said. "But it has increased in size."

Michaud said his work to combat unnecessary idling began one day about a year and a half ago. He said he stopped by the Chittenden Solid Waste Management District (CSWMD) facility, and he saw a vehicle idling for a long time for no apparent reason. "I could not believe that they would leave their vehicle idling for that long," he said.

He began by approaching CSWMD officials with his concern about the idling vehicle, and he said they took action on their own once he called attention to the problem.

"They surprised me by taking the initiative to implement a no-idling policy for their vehicles," he said.

Michaud said that the Addison County Relocalization Network, of which he is a member, also helped Idle-Free VT in the early stages.

Although he hopes for more comprehensive regulation of unnecessary idling than the new law offers, Michaud said the S.13 was a step in the right direction.

Ayer said that bill was successful partly because the previous effort got hung up on details of who should pay a penalty like a fine for unnecessary idling, but this year's bill has no such provision. It requires school districts to have come up with rules of their own, but the schools themselves will enforce those rules, not by the state.

The law only requires districts to form policies about the idling of school buses, no other vehicles on school property, and districts will not be required to forbid idling entirely.

Even without strict penalties, those involved with creating the bill are confident that it will be effective in reducing idling. Supporters say the main value of the law is in making people aware of the issue in the first place, and in supplementing public awareness

campaigns like one organized by Idle-Free VT about the problems caused by idling in general.

Michaud compared the school bus idling law to a similar law years ago that required the use of seatbelts.

"Although educational efforts are the most important thing in combating unnecessary vehicle idling, to have a law behind it makes people pay more attention," he said.