

ADDISON INDEPENDENT

January 13, 2011

I smelled emissions in the school pick up zone last week among exiting vehicles. I knew better than to idle needlessly and delayed 5 minutes before adding to this medley of toxic particles hanging nose level with young people waiting for their buses and rides.

It's that time of year --the time of wasting fuel waiting for vehicles to warm and windshields to clear. Fuel-efficient driving becomes particularly challenging in winter months because fuel consumption and pollution output are much higher in cold weather.

I've learned that I don't need more than 30 seconds of idling to circulate the engine oil before I drive away on cold days. Anything longer just wastes money. I remember that more than the engine needs to be warmed - so do the tires, transmission, wheel bearings and other moving parts and so the best way to warm the engine and all other components is to begin driving my vehicle. I avoid high speeds and rapid acceleration for the first minutes because the goal is to bring my whole vehicle up to peak operating temperature as quickly as possible while maximizing fuel economy.

I know it's unsafe to drive before my windows are defrosted, but I've learned I can prevent icing or speed up the de-icing process. I can cover my windshield with an old bedsheet tucked in place by my doors. Or I can make a spray of 3 parts vinegar to one part water and apply it before I go to bed. If I forget these, I can use a de-icing solution of two parts rubbing alcohol to one part water and watch the ice peel right off. A good ice scraper is handy also. An old credit card's thin edge works well to remove light ice films.

When it's cold, it's more economical and fuel-efficient to turn my car off and on rather than to leave it running for a few minutes. If I'm going to be stopped for more than 10 seconds (except in traffic), I'll save fuel and money by turning off the vehicle and then restarting it when I'm ready to drive again. Restarting cars many times doesn't wear out batteries and starter motors too soon. Catalytic converters stay warm for up to 25 minutes after you turn off the engine, so frequent stops and starts don't produce the large amount of harmful emissions seen with cold starts. My hybrid "shuts off" automatically while in drive and eliminates the need for me to stop and start.

Another thing I do to reduce fuel consumption in the winter is get rid of the snow build up in my wheel wells and under the bumper to decrease weight and rolling resistance, which in turn reduces fuel consumption. Under deflated tires also contribute to unnecessary increases in fuel consumption, which can be avoided by checking tire pressure regularly, especially after drops in temperature.

Of course, the best thing I can do is limit my car use. Effective trip planning is important in winter to avoid making more cold starts than needed. May time and weather be on your side.

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