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City announces no-idling campaign

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Burlington kicked off a new campaign against vehicle idling Monday with a united front of the city's administrative leadership.

In a morning news conference in front of City Hall, Mayor Bob Kiss, Police Chief Tom Tremblay and other city department heads urged residents to join public employees in creating "an idle-free Burlington." They even dusted off Burlington's longstanding, long-overlooked no-idling ordinance, which is drawing fresh notice amid the rising public concern over greenhouse gas emissions and climate change.

Spearheading the city's new "educational campaign" is the Burlington Legacy Project, a public-private partnership that its director, Betsy Rosenbluth, described as a "sustainable city initiative." She passed out literature on the environmental and health effects of vehicle idling, and held up a red-and-white sign that's being posted around the city and that reads: "No idling ... Idling pollutes and is illegal."

The thrust of the campaign is that most vehicle idling is unnecessary and contributes gratuitously to air pollution and greenhouse-gas buildup, which has been linked to global warming. Carbon dioxide, the principal greenhouse gas, is a byproduct of combustion.

Kiss said that idling has a "cumulative" effect on greenhouse gas emissions that he said could be reduced, in an "incremental" and meaningful way, through more public awareness.

Burlington's anti-idling ordinance, enacted in 1990, has never been enforced. The ordinance -- Article III, Section: 20-55(e) -- prohibits idling for more than five minutes between April 1 and Nov. 1, with four exceptions, including refrigerated trucks. The fine for a violation would be \$45.

Tremblay said he hoped "enforcement won't be necessary" if the anti-idling campaign is effective. He said the police department would begin by giving verbal warnings.

Burlington police do enforce a state law that bans leaving the motor running in an "unattended motor vehicle." This law (Title 23, Subchapter 1111) dates from 1973 and was motivated by a concern for safety and security -- to prevent vehicle theft and runaway cars -- rather than environmental protection. The fine for this is \$84.

Vermont and Maine are the only two states in the Northeast that have no regulations on idling. Of four bills on idling before the Legislature, one (Senate Bill 13), calling for limits on idling on school property, has advanced out of committee and has passed the Senate.

Steve Goodkind, director of public works, said "there's no modern vehicle that needs to warm up more than 30 seconds." He pointed out that some vehicles with specialized equipment are exempt from the idling ban, however. Wayne Gross of Parks and Recreation said his department adopted a no-idling policy a year ago. Jeanne Collins, superintendent of schools, said the school district has had a no-idling policy since 2004 -- in part because vehicle exhaust can aggravate students' asthma.

Also offering brief remarks in support of the campaign were Nancy Wood, of the Burlington Business Association; Ron Redmond, of the Church Street Marketplace; and Jim Flint, a resident who has been beating the no-idling drum for more than a year.

Asked why the city was inaugurating the campaign now, after 17 years of not enforcing the no-idling ordinance,

Kiss replied that the public has become considerably more aware of the environmental consequences of "failing to pay more attention to details." He said the city might want to consider extending the no-idling ordinance throughout the year.

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