

OPINION

Thursday, November 4, 2010

Going 'greener' includes less idling

More and more folks that I know and that I read about in Vermont are interested in ways to be more "green." One of the simplest ways is to get into the habit of shutting off the engine of your car or truck when parked.

You'll not only be more green, but you will also keep more "green" in your wallet by avoiding needless fuel waste and engine wear (as many owner's manuals warn us about), help yourself and others breathe easier, and conserve energy that will help lessen America's reliance on foreign oil. Not to be overlooked is the law. Going into a convenience store for a cup of coffee? Letting a vehicle idle while unattended in public is illegal in Vermont. So is idling while parked for more than three minutes in Burlington.

MY Wayne
TURN Michaud

The U.S. Department of Energy's Argonne National Laboratory is testing and measuring vehicle idling and developing a National Idling Reduction Campaign. They have determined that "if each car in the United States idles just six minutes per day, about 3 billion gallons of fuel are wasted annually, costing drivers \$10 billion."

Argonne recommends avoiding warming up your car (exception: safety reasons, such as windshield defrosting). The key is the catalytic converter, which cannot remove harmful emissions from the exhaust while the vehicle is sitting and idling; the vehicle needs to be driven for the "cat" to function

as it was designed to. A 30-second warmup is all that's needed for the oil to circulate throughout the engine.

Is there any downside to avoiding idling? Yes -- your comfort. Many of us are accustomed to having our vehicle interiors warm or cool, depending on the weather. If you want to be green, you have to sacrifice a little bit of this comfort. Instead of using a remote vehicle starter in cold weather, bundle up. And instead of crawling along in a drive through, park the car and walk into the place of business.

As you endeavor to become a greener driver, here's some idling facts:

■ Idling gets zero miles per gallon.

■ Idling for more than 10 seconds uses more fuel than it takes to shut off

and restart an engine.

■ Idling for 10 minutes is the equivalent of traveling five miles.

■ Children are most vulnerable to idling vehicles (such as when waiting in a school parking lot) because their lungs and airways are immature, and their breathing zone is lower than adults.

■ Idling contributes to Vermont's transportation greenhouse gas emissions, which are almost twice the U.S. average, based on a geographic calculation.

So, as you practice a green lifestyle that includes reusing, recycling, being a "localvore," conserving water and conserving energy, please add to your list: reducing idling. Your mother (Earth) will thank you.

Wayne Michaud of Bristol is director of Idle-Free VT Inc.