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No good reason to let vehicles idle

Why do folks park and leave their engines running? At convenience stores, post offices, even at gas pumps — it's bound to be happening. You know, a vehicle that is just sitting there and idling while its owner goes about business, sometimes not even near the vehicle.

The logic behind it can drive me crazy. Perhaps the answer is the notion that idling is good for the engine (false), or to keep the vehicle warm (on a winter day a shut off vehicle will retain most of its warmth for 10 minutes). One thing is certain. You don't have to know an iota about the various ways unnecessary idling does harm to realize one basic fact. An idling vehicle is getting zero, zilch, nada miles to the gallon. It is costing us good money, people.

Wasted fuel isn't the only way idling hits us in our wallets. It sounds hard to believe but here's the facts, ma'am: Idling causes engine component damage. Since an idling engine is not oper-

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ating at peak temperature, fuel combustion is incomplete. Fuel residues can condense on cylinder walls, contaminate oil and — there you go — damage engine components. And that's not all. With more engine idling, these residues tend to deposit on spark plugs. The resulting plug fouling can increase fuel consumption by 4 to 5 percent. Excessive idling can also cause water to condense in the vehicle's exhaust. This can lead to corrosion and reduce the life of the exhaust system. Get the picture? Don't idle when parked. Your engine components will appreciate it.

Now, about idling and the law. When John Doe lets his car idle while he goes into a store to order coffee and a doughnut, guess what, he's breaking the law. Although the state of Vermont has yet to enact an idle-reduction law, there is an un-

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attended motor vehicle law on the books. And it has been enforced. As to gas pumps, there are two good reasons every one is posted with a warning to turn off the engine while filling up. To let it run is not only illegal, it is dangerous.

Allow us to breathe that clean Vermont air. Vehicles — even today's modern, catalytic-equipped variety — emit a nasty brew of chemicals. Here's just a sampling: carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide, sulfur dioxide and benzene. They impair our lungs and heart. Children, the elderly and people with asthma are especially vulnerable.

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engine chug along at idle for a few minutes has been shown to impact on our hard-earned dollars, the law and our health. But there's even more. Our planet. Yeah, the one we all call home. Mother Earth does not like greenhouse gas emissions, which cause global climate change. Parked cars, trucks and school buses are idling and contributing to global climate change in every Vermont town (and beyond). Every day. That's tons and tons of emissions we don't have to be emitting.

So there you have it. Now it's up to all of us to break the idling habit. It's a win-win. We all benefit.

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