

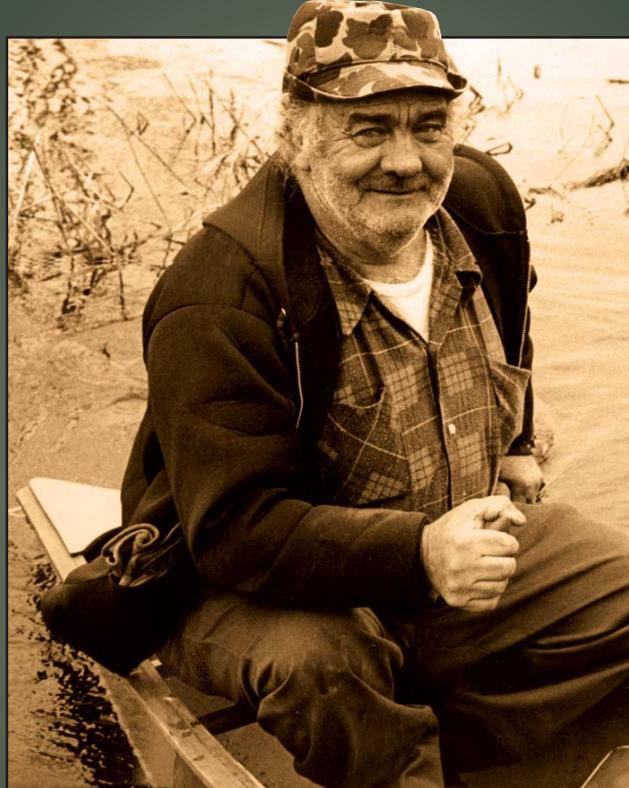
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So You Want To Save Money?

Say no to car idling

by Wayne Michaud

You want an easy way to save money? Save gas? I'm going to let you in on a secret. You (and thousands of other Vermonters) no longer need to let your vehicle idle when it's parked. Just shut it off when you go into a convenience store, post office or when pumping gas. Then restart it when you're ready to resume your trip. It's that simple. Each day you practice it, the more you save.

You may be thinking, "Perhaps, but I want to keep the car interior warm," or "I want to keep it cool," or "it's better for the engine to let it run." A shut off vehicle will maintain its warmth for a while even in subfreezing weather. In the heat, just open windows. It'll keep its cool when you return with a cold soda.

Here's the savings:

- **Avoid fuel waste:** Oil has hit the \$100-a-barrel mark. Gas is over \$3 a gallon and may be \$4 by summer. Idling yields zero miles per gallon. For a typical vehicle, idling for 10 minutes uses the same amount of fuel it takes to go about five miles. Our neighbors to the north have done extensive studies on idling. Canada's federal Idle-Free Zone tells us that idling for more than 10 seconds wastes more fuel than restarting. And that, even in subfreezing temperatures, we should not warm up our vehicles for more than 30 seconds (unless defrosting is not adequate, or when occupants are infants or elderly). The best way to warm up not only the engine, but also the transmission, bearings, catalytic converter, etc. is by driving it. Just go slowly to moderately to get lubricants flowing.

- **Avoid engine damage:** It's hard to convince folks that idling is not

good for the engine. The Idle-Free Zone explains it this way: an idling engine is not operating at peak temperature, resulting in incomplete fuel combustion. Fuel residues can condense on cylinder walls, contaminate oil and damage engine components. With more engine idling these residues tend to deposit on spark plugs. The resulting plug fouling can increase fuel consumption by five 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.

Even more compelling reasons to give up the unnecessary idling habit:

- **Allow us to breathe clean air:** The most serious concern about idling is its affect on our health. According to the American Lung Association, the exhaust of even today's modern vehicles contains more than half a dozen heavy-duty chemicals that cause respiratory illness and affects our hearts and lungs. Children, the elderly and asthmatics are particularly vulnerable.

- **Be less of a greenhouse gas hog:** Carbon dioxide, a component of vehicle exhaust, is the main manmade contributor to global warming. While Vermont overall is a low carbon producing state, note that our transportation greenhouse gas emissions, on a per-capita basis, are nearly double the national average. And for anyone who's skeptical about the impact of parked idling vehicles, chew on this: there are more than 550,000 vehicles registered in Vermont. If every one of these vehicles reduced their idling by five minutes a day, the total CO2 emissions reduction would exceed 62,000 tons/year.



- **Obey the law:** In Vermont, under certain circumstances and in certain locales, it's illegal to idle. A vehicle may not idle while unattended on public property. School buses may not idle on school property; depending on the school district, vehicles other than school buses may be subject to this law. Burlington's idling statute is in effect between April and November. And in the last year, several towns, mindful of health and energy issues, have enacted idle-free resolutions.

Besides the idling reduction tips above, here's what else you can do:

- Avoid using a remote vehicle starter, which encourages unnecessary idling. Consider an engine block heater instead.
 - Avoid drive-thrus. Shut the engine off and get some exercise.
 - Consider the purchase of a gas/electric hybrid vehicle which seldom idles.
 - Spread the word to family and friends.
 - Get published—use the above compelling facts to write a letter to the editor or an op-ed.
 - Contact your state representatives letting them know you want an all motor vehicle idle-reduction law.
- So, you want to save money? Save gas? Just turn off the key.

Wayne Michaud of Bristol is director of the Idle-Free VT campaign. Visit www.idlefreevt.org

Let Consumers Decide



Paying for your gas

by Mitch Smith

There are a number of different areas in which we could argue against the adoption of laws which would make it illegal to allow cars to idle for various periods of time. Any of these points, as well as several others not mentioned, could easily take-up the allotted space for this article. With that in mind, it is my intent to only present the most basic arguments against car idling legislation, which will hopefully allow readers to investigate further and make up their own minds about this invasive principle.

The first theory often cited by those in favor of legislation preventing car idling is that the extended idling of vehicles has a direct impact on global warming. Obviously, this is not the forum to discuss whether global warming actually exists, much less what it is impacted by, but I simply ask that readers keep an open mind to the fact that there is a substantial amount of research which calls into question many beliefs about the cause/reality of global warming. Unfortunately, many of these are never printed in the national news media, thus the public is denied the right to know there is a legitimate and well documented contrary side to the global warming controversy.

There is also a Constitutional argument to be made against car idling laws. Basically, car idling laws, like seat belt laws, represent expanding law enforcement, and such laws infringe on a person's rights as guaranteed in the

Fourth, Fifth, and the Ninth Amendments, and the Civil Rights section of the Fourteenth Amendment.

In theory, if your car is idling (say as you wait at the end of the line at a traffic light on an extremely frigid day) you could be stopped for a minor traffic violation that otherwise would be ignored. This creates the possibility you may also be targeted because of a bumper sticker, your license plate, your age, race, or gender. This opens the door for police harassment, stalking, intimidation and profiling. Young people, women, and minorities are vulnerable, especially when traveling alone and at night, or in certain neighborhoods. Would there be more enforcement of idling laws in affluent-Anglo neighborhoods at drug-store windows, or in low-income minority-dominated neighborhoods at fast-food restaurants?

There is also the first-step legislation which car idling laws would represent. For those not familiar with the term "first-step" it is the practice of moderate laws being enacted which will provide a gateway to more strict regulations.

Would next-step legislation be to mandate vehicles be required to meet certain fuel-efficiency standards? Obviously this removes the most basic reason to be opposed to car idling legislation—that it directly inhibits consumer choice.

There is no doubt that idling a vehicle for an extended amount of time uses more gas. However, as a consumer, every time I fill up my tank I make a choice about how I am going to use the product I purchased. Perhaps I want to use my vehicle to

take a drive and view the foliage. Will the next step be that a commission will decide that this is not an acceptable way to use gasoline?

If I am purchasing the gasoline for my vehicle, might it be possible that I am more than willing to pay for additional gas to make sure my vehicle is warm when I get inside? Isn't the fact that I am consciously using gas to warm my vehicle proof that I would rather have a warm vehicle than the money saved from using less gas?

This is also apparent in the kind of vehicle I choose to drive. If I make the decision to buy a large SUV with poor gas mileage, I am making a statement that there is something about that vehicle which fulfills my needs/desires as a consumer, and I am willing to pay the price which accompanies this at the gas pump.

Conversely, there is also a theory that people who are adamant about not allowing vehicles to idle, might be more inclined to be wasteful in other areas of their lives. In seat belt studies, this is known as "risk compensation." Essentially, a driver believes that because he/she is wearing a seat belt, they tend to drive more recklessly. With energy conservation, it is easy to see how this theory may be mimicked.

The reality is that these arguments are just a small handful of the many reasons that lawmakers and voters should be very wary of any legislation that would curtail basic civil liberties and consumer choice.

Mitch Smith is a freelance writer from the central part of Vermont.