

An Idle Car Is of the Devil: 'Just Say No' to Engine Idling

BY MARY MARGARET BREED

Don't do it. Auto and truck drivers need to break the habit of idling their motors. Yes, even on cold Vermont mornings. Yes, both private and business vehicles.

The jury is in. To save fuel and spare the atmosphere, motorists are admonished by transportation, engineering, and air quality authorities to switch off engines within a maximum of 30 seconds of becoming stationary.

Yes, even for convenience store stops. Yes, even waiting for a drive-up hamburger or dropping off a package.

Turning the engine off and on consumes less fuel and produces fewer emissions than 10 to 30 seconds of idling, engineering studies show.

And today, the best way to warm up a cold car is to get in and go. It's not like the old carburetor days; modern fuel-injected engines don't need more than 30 seconds to circulate oil around the engine.

Get out the brush and scraper, knock ice off the windows and get rid of the rooftop snow load. Not only can that top snow slide into your field of vision, it's also a fuel-consuming aerodynamic drag. Clear the car, then turn on the engine and drive away after 30 seconds.

Vermont DMV Enforcement and Safety Officer Glen Button told The Herald that in Vermont only Burlington and some other municipalities have to date translated these principles into law for private vehicles (although school bus idling laws are statewide). But idling laws for all vehicles are now on the books in New Hampshire, Massachusetts and many other states. Laws usually say to turn off the engine within five minutes.

Idle-Free Vermont, Inc., says, "Idling is wasteful and harmful. It's wasteful because idling gets you zero mpg. It's harmful because excessive idling can actually damage your engine components over time, including cylinders, spark plugs, and exhaust systems.

"Fuel is only partially combusted when idling because an engine does not operate at its peak temperature. This leads to the buildup of fuel residues on cylinder walls that can damage engine components and increase fuel consumption."

Prevent Theft

Idling unattended vehicles for more than five minutes has been prohibited in Vermont since 1973, when that law was enacted to discourage theft. From a police standpoint, the puffs of hot exhaust into cold air act like a beacon to would-be car

thieves.

The American Lung Association's Vermont Idle-Free Fleets program provides business fleet operators with a toolkit that explains the myths and realities associated with truck idling, the health effects of diesel exhaust, the cost savings achieved by an idling reduction policy, and sample model policies.

"Eliminating unnecessary diesel idling is a win for Vermont businesses, public health and the environment," said spokesperson Wayne Michaud. For more information about the program, contact e-mail idlefreefleetsvt@lungne.org or call the American Lung Association in Williston at 802-876-6860.

To save money, improve air quality, protect health (of the driver and everybody else in the vicinity), slow the advance of climate change, and reduce American dependence on oil, don't idle.

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The Herald

Date: Thursday, March 10, 2011
Location: RANDOLPH, VT
Circulation (DMA): 6,200 (90)
Type (Frequency): Newspaper (W)
Page: C6
Keyword: American Lung Association

