

Cut the ignition

STOWE REPORTER EDITORIAL

03/27/08

Is Stowe an idle-free zone? Some folks are trying to make it so.

The Stowe Climate Action Network, a group of local people who want to curb energy consumption and waste in Stowe, and Idle-Free Vermont have teamed up to urge area drivers to turn off their vehicles when they're not occupied or when they're not being driven. If you leave your car idling around here, you might find an "Idling gets you nowhere" notice under your windshield, explaining the ample merits of not idling.

It's such a logical, small sacrifice for conservation, air quality, good old thrift and, yes, even national security and business that it seems overkill to plug this effort.

But some folks bristle at the notion that they're being told how to use their vehicles and their gas. In response to that: Of course you can do whatever you want with your vehicle and your gas. This isn't about bullying, or even lecturing. It's just about taking one small step to be frugal, conscious and neighborly.

There's a reason Stratton Mountain and Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, among thousands of other places around America, have posted "Idle-Free Zone" signs in their parking lots and customer drop-off areas. It sends a decent message about caring for your neighbors, your planet and your wallet. It also says, "We're green," which, for a town like Stowe, with its emphasis on recreation, health and the natural environment, is money in the bank. It makes sense for Stowe's businesses, already beginning to engage in green initiatives, and the town government to put up "Idle-Free Zone" signs, too, in public and private parking areas.

The facts are pretty basic:

- Idling wastes fuel and, therefore, wastes money. Idling 10 minutes a day consumes an average of 27 gallons of fuel a year, according to Idle-free Vermont. The group estimates Vermont could save 16 million gallons of gas a year. Even if it were half that amount, imagine what 8 million gallons of gas represents.
- Health and climate-change concerns. Auto emissions are toxic, especially to children and the elderly, and emissions contribute to climate change. It's one thing to send toxic chemicals into the air and atmosphere when we're using our vehicles for transportation. It's quite another if it's just for the convenience of returning to a warm or cool car.
- The political appropriateness of making do with less. Every gallon of gas we don't use is one less gallon America needs to buy from dubious friends in the Middle East and Venezuela.
- Other than the convenience of keeping the interior of your car cool in the summer and warm in the winter, there is no mechanical upside to idling. And no downside to turning it off and restarting it.

It would be a shame if Vermont turned to legislation to force us to be smart about not idling. A bunch of anti-idling bills are pending in the Legislature, and it's already illegal for school buses and vehicles to idle on school property.

But instead of following places like Hawaii, Massachusetts and many Canadian municipalities, where laws forbid idling, good-old green Vermont should be an idle-free zone with no arm-twisting from Big Brother.

And we can start right here in idle-free Stowe.