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Why we need an idling law

By WAYNE MICHAUD

Ever see a UPS driver make a delivery and leave the truck running? That would be quite a sighting. UPS has had a strict fuel-efficiency policy for many years that includes shutting down its diesel parcel trucks for every delivery through each day, no matter how quick a stop or whether it's zero or 100 degrees out.

Why does UPS do it? First, it saves money. Big money. The company's ground fleet numbers more than 100,000 vehicles. Just by practicing an idling reduction policy, UPS saves more than \$12 million annually. UPS also does it to enhance its green image and to improve air quality for its drivers and everyone. It's the smart thing to do, and it's the right thing to do.

The question that should also be asked is: Why don't most other trucking companies have idling reduction policies? If UPS can do it, why not others? Good question. One answer is many are not aware that, due to evolving diesel technology, most of the reasons diesels needed to idle decades ago are no longer true.

Look at gelling, for instance. The myth persists that to avoid fuel gelling, heavy-duty diesels should not be shut down in cold weather. The reality is refiners have resolved this issue by creating winter blends that better withstand lower temperatures and that fuel additives solve condensation problems.

What about warming up a heavy-duty diesel? Unless near zero degrees, well-maintained engines need not warm up for more than three to five minutes, according to engine manufacturers such as Caterpillar Inc. and Cummins Inc.

Can engines suffer increased wear from excessive idling? You bet. IC Corp. states excessive idling "may decrease oil life." And Cummins Inc. adds that it can cause carbon buildup and fuel dilution. The American Trucking Association states that such wear can increase maintenance costs by more than \$2,000 per truck per year and shorten the life of the engine. So, do your engine a favor and avoid excessive idling.

Another question: Among the 11 states in the northeastern United States, which is the only one that does not have a truck idling reduction law? You guessed it — Vermont. Indeed, the Governor's Commission on Climate Change has found that, on a geographic basis, Vermont's transportation greenhouse gas emissions are nearly double the U.S. average. But our Green Mountain State has a chance to be more green and more healthy. A truck idling bill in the Vermont Legislature — H.0154, an act relating to idling of heavy-duty motor vehicles — would reasonably restrict the idling of vehicles of more than 10,000 pounds.

Contact your legislators and tell them you want this bill enacted. This law will encourage trucking companies to get on board with adopting idling reduction policies — just like UPS —

that will benefit them and everyone.

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Wayne Michaud is coordinator of the American Lung Association's Vermont Idle-Free Fleets program.
