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Advocates seek to extend idling ban to large vehicles

By DANIEL BARLOW Vermont Press Bureau

MONTPELIER – Vermont is the only New England state that doesn't ban engine idling for most vehicles.

But that could soon change.

Two years after the state placed restrictions on buses idling outside of public schools, lawmakers and advocates are eyeing a new proposal that would extend that ban to large vehicles, such as delivery and commercial trucks.

"Vehicles were not designed to idle," said Rep. David Sharpe, D-Bristol, the sponsor of a bill that would place time restrictions on the idling of trucks that weigh more than 10,000 pounds. "It's not good for the engine."

It's also not good for the environment or people's health. A car idling for one hour releases 9.7 pounds of carbon dioxide – the leading cause of climate change – into the air. Breathing in the fumes from resting cars that still have their motors running is harmful, especially for people with respiratory problems.

Sharpe's bill, H.97, was introduced in the 2009 legislative session, but supporters are hoping that the proposal gets a stronger reception when lawmakers return to Montpelier in January. Sharpe said opposition to anti-idling legislation has died down in recent years, although the question of how to enforce such a law is still a stumbling block.

That question is not bothering Lisa Campion, a second-year student at the Vermont Law School who spearheaded a youth project to study vehicle idling. That group, the Vermont 4-H Youth Environmental Council, released a report Wednesday urging lawmakers to pass Sharpe's bill and go even further to ban most vehicle idling all together.

"We have a seatbelt law that we enforce, so why can't we enforce an anti-idling law?" Campion said.

The students' seven-page report – written by 15-year-old Kathryn Tadio of Rutland County, 16-year-old Anya Rose of Chittenden County and 17-year-old Kayla Ray of Chittenden County – covers everything from the definition of engine idling to the environmental impact to what other states have done on this issue.

The report makes the case that Vermont should model a law in Connecticut that banned vehicle idling for more than three minutes in most situations. Those exceptions – emergency

vehicles, health issues and bad weather – are contained in the laws that many other states have passed.

Ray, one of the students who worked on the project, wrote in the report that the problem of enforcing an anti-idling law isn't much of a problem at all. Many laws are difficult to enforce, she wrote, but are still effective at stopping a practice. Her example: Vermont's seat belt law, which only carries a fine of \$25.

"This works because the laws are passed simply for the purpose of spreading awareness of the issue," she wrote. "The knowledge that the action is lawfully "wrong" prevents a large portion of the population from doing it."

The report recommends including information about idling in driver's education courses taught in Vermont. They also suggest that information be included in the Vermont Driver's Manual, a guidebook given to new motorists in the state.

"No idling signs could be placed near schools, bank drive-through, and the bus station to start," wrote Tadio, another student who worked on the project. "Eventually signs could be placed in front of convenience stores and other drive through type of businesses."

In promoting an anti-idling policy, advocates say they need to confront some myths that people have about cars. These include that vehicles need up to 15 minutes to warm up (three minutes will usually do) and that it wastes more gas to stop and restart a car than it does to let it idle for a few minutes.

"Starting and stopping your car does some damage too, but it is not as bad as letting it idle," said Sharpe, who added that restarting the car uses less gas than 10 seconds of idling.

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