



Idling at School

A project of Green Communities
| Active & Safe Routes to School

Background Sheet

A few facts about engine idling:

Why do so many drivers keep their engines running while they are stopped? Recent market research found the following most common reasons:

- Warming up the car
- Waiting for someone
- Doing an errand

Other reasons, reported by drivers, for leaving their engines running include:

- Personal comfort
- Listening to the radio
- Parking illegally
- Convenience

Many drivers also mistakenly believe that turning off their engines for a short stop is more harmful to their car than leaving the engine running.

The truth and consequences of engine idling:

- **It wastes fuel:** Three percent of Ontario's fuel is wasted by idling. An idling gas engine burns about 3.5 litres an hour. Ten seconds of idling uses more fuel than restarting the engine!
- **It wastes money:** \$1.8 million of fuel is idled away by Canadians every day.
- **It contributes to reduced quality of our air:** An idling engine produces twice as many exhaust emissions as an engine in motion, significantly contributing to local air pollution.
- **It contributes to global climate change:** Idling engines account for 8 million kilograms of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions per day. Passenger transportation is responsible for 18% of Canada's total GHG emissions.
- **It is harmful to your engine:** An idling engine is not operating at its peak temperature, which means fuel combustion is incomplete. Soot deposits can accumulate on cylinder walls leading to oil contamination and damaged components. Idling, while warming an engine, does not warm the wheel bearings, steering, transmission and tires – only driving does this.

HEALTH ALERT: Children are particularly vulnerable to air pollution because they breathe faster than adults and inhale more air per pound of body weight. Smog levels tend to be worse in the late afternoon, precisely when driving parents accumulate around the schoolyard. This glut of idling engines contributes to the bubble of smog that engulfs the school and into which rush excited and active children.

Many people believe that they are protected from air pollution if they remain inside their vehicles. Not so according to a report by the International Center for Technology Assessment (CTA). CTA found that exposure to most auto pollutants, including volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and carbon monoxide (CO), is much higher inside vehicles than at the roadside. VOCs and CO are linked to serious health problems – like respiratory irritation and cancer – and are known to shorten life (www.icta.org). The highest exposure occurs when sitting in traffic congestion on highways or in a line-up of idling vehicles at a transit stop or outside of a school.

Become an idle-free motorist: Today's modern engines require no more than 30 seconds of idling at start-up, even on winter days. Ten seconds of idling uses more fuel than restarting your engine. If your vehicle is equipped with an automatic starter, try to avoid using it until just prior to boarding the vehicle. When you are dropping off or picking up your children at school, please stop in a safe, legal parking space and turn off your engine. Then safely walk your children to and from the school.

Help to make your school an idle-free zone. We'll all breathe a little easier.

Sources: LURA Consulting/McKenzie-Mohr Associates; Natural Resources Canada; City of Toronto, Department of Public Health and Works and Emergency Services; Canadian Automobile Association; Health Canada; Ontario Ministry of Environment; International Center for Technology Assessment.