

GREENWorks

Ideas for a Cleaner Environment

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No Need to Idle

Did you know that every day, millions of cars idle needlessly in lines, dropping off or picking up passengers, making deliveries, or waiting in drive-thru lanes? It's normal to idle when stopped for traffic signals, but if you voluntarily idle your car for longer periods, you are wasting money, causing air pollution, affecting climate change, and possibly damaging engine parts.

Many of us still operate our cars using habits and out-dated assumptions we've followed for years. But with the newer fuel-injected engines, many of these "rules" aren't true anymore. Let's set the record straight about idling.

- Today's fuel-injected engines don't need to be warmed up. Today's car only needs about 30 seconds of idling on a cold day before driving, and the engine actually warms up more quickly once the car is operating.
- Frequent restarting does *not* use more gas. Letting the vehicle idle for more than approximately 10 seconds uses more gas than shutting it off and restarting.
- Frequent restarting will not harm the vehicle.

With today's fuel prices, consider the fact that you're actually getting zero miles per gallon while the car is going nowhere. In addition, while the vehicle is idling, it is not operating at its peak temperature. This means incomplete combustion, so fuel residue condenses on engine parts like spark plugs and can contaminate engine oil. Also, idling allows water to condense in the exhaust system, which can cause rust and additional repair work.

Did you ever get a whiff of the exhaust from an idling vehicle? Doesn't smell very good, does it? Emissions from the tailpipes of idling vehicles create smog and ground level ozone that have a direct impact on our health. Everyone in the vicinity of an idling car is breathing toxic fumes. Unhealthy air quality is bad for all of us, but especially dangerous, and even life threatening for those people with cardiovascular and respiratory illnesses, like asthma.

Last, but not least, burning fossil fuels like gasoline contributes to climate change by producing emissions of carbon dioxide, the principal greenhouse gas. You can eliminate unnecessary releases into the atmosphere by simply turning off the engine whenever possible!

So, there is no need to idle. Instead, use driving to warm-up the engine; turn your car off when you think your wait will be more than 10 seconds; and as much as practical, go into an establishment rather than use the drive-thru. Ask your family and friends to avoid idling. Consider adopting a "no idling" ordinance in your town or city. These steps will help us all breathe a little easier, save you money, and clean-up our air.

For more information on air quality and idling, contact Kathy Brockett, New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, Air Resources Division at (603) 271-6284 or kbrockett@des.state.nh.us or visit, www.des.nh.gov/ard_intro.htm.

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