

Clearing the Air on Car Idling

Natural Resources Canada reports that the transportation sector is “the single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Canada”, even with modern day emissions technology and more fuel-efficient cars. Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) is the most significant greenhouse gas linked to global climate change. For every litre of fuel your car burns, 2.4 kg of CO₂ is produced. This is an important concern considering that today, people are owning and driving more cars than ever before!

Canadians have already started to realize the implications of global warming and climate change. We have also started to make the connection between our environment, climate change and our health. There are so many easy ways for us to contribute to Canada’s National climate change efforts. It’s as easy as turning the key to an engine!

Idle Facts

1. Research has shown a direct link between contaminants in vehicle emissions and significant respiratory problems. Canada has seen a steady increase in hospital admissions, respiratory illnesses and premature deaths, especially in urban centres.
2. Health Canada estimates that more than 5,000 Canadians die prematurely each year because of air pollution. Children are particularly vulnerable because they breathe faster than adults and inhale more air per kilogram of body weight.
3. On average, Canadian motorists idle their vehicles between 5 to 10 minutes a day. A recent study suggests that in the peak of winter, we voluntarily idle our vehicles for a combined total of more than 75 million minutes a day! That’s like one car idling for 144 years!
4. Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) is the principal Greenhouse Gas. If every driver of a light-duty vehicle in Canada avoided idling for just five minutes a day, collectively, we would prevent more than 1.6 million tonnes of CO₂ from entering the atmosphere each year.
5. If every driver of a light duty vehicle avoided idling by five minutes a day, we would save 1.8 million litres of fuel per day – this represents roughly \$1.7 million in fuel cost savings!
6. Every 10 minutes of idling costs you about a fifth of a litre in waste fuel (more if your vehicle has an eight-cylinder engine). Ten seconds of idling can use more fuel than turning off your engine and restarting it.

Idle Myths

1. “In the winter, I need to warm up my car before I drive – idling is the only way to do this!”
 - Even in cold weather, idling is not an effective way to warm up your vehicle. The best way to warm up your car is to drive it! The engines in most cars today are controlled electronically which means you can drive after only 30 seconds of idling, even in very cold weather. Besides, the engine is only one part of your vehicle. Your vehicle’s wheel bearings, steering, suspension, transmission and tires also need to be warmed up, and this only happens once your car is moving.
2. “But if I drive on a cold engine, my engine will be ruined!”
 - Not true! In fact, idling your car can actually cause engine damage. An idling engine does not operate at its peak temperature, so fuel combustion is incomplete. Fuel residues can condense on cylinder walls, contaminate oil and damage engine components. Water may condense in the vehicle’s exhaust which could lead to corrosion!
3. “Won’t turning my car on and off all the time eventually damage my engine?”
 - No! Studies have shown that frequent restarting has very little impact on your engine components. Frequent restarting adds about \$10 per year to the cost driving – this in no way compares to the money you’ll save in fuel costs just from reduced idling.

You hold the keys!

Stopping excessive vehicle idling is an easy way to help improve air quality and respiratory health in our communities. Use these keys as a guide:

- If you’re going to be stopped for more than 10 seconds, turn off the engine (except in traffic).
- Limit warm-up idling to 30 seconds and drive away as soon as possible after a cold start. Avoid high speeds and rapid acceleration until your vehicle warms up (usually after about five kilometers)
- Don’t use remote car starters! They might encourage you to warm up your car well before you’re ready to drive, causing unnecessary idling!
- Always keep your vehicle tuned and in good running condition. A poorly tuned engine can use up to 15% more energy, releases more greenhouse emissions, and uses more fuel when idling than a well-tuned vehicle.

- Use a block heater to warm your car engine in winter instead of idling. Block heaters warm the engine block and lubricants so the engine will start more easily. Remember that you don't need to leave a block heater plugged in over night – two hours is more than enough. Use an automatic timer to turn the block heater on two hours before you need to drive.

Stay tuned for more information on the City of Oshawa's Anti-Idling Campaign!

This anti-idling information originates from Natural Resources Canada. For more information on anti-idling, please visit Natural Resources Canada website: <http://oee.nrcan.gc.ca/transportation/personal/idling.cfm?attr=8>