Stop Idling, Change the World.

Buzz Word of the Week

greenhouse gas (GHG)
–noun
five different gases responsible for the greenhouse effect, including carbon dioxide, methane, ozone, and the fluorocarbons.

Scott Groves, Service Manager at Coast Mountain GM, turns off the engine. Doing so reduces fuel consumption and resulting greenhouse gas emissions.

By Michael Simpson,
Executive Director at One Sky

While waiting impatiently for the road and bridge construction this summer many motorists made the choice to turn off their engines. With the price of gas in the $1.40 range saving money on fuel probably influenced their decision, but was it really worth it? Exactly what are the impacts of idling and does it really make a difference if we turn off our engines?

The answer is surprising. A car uses twice as much fuel idling as it does when driving around at a normal speed. Even worse, because it is less efficient when it burns fuel, it produces a lot more pollution. The average wait of ten minutes at the bridge in a well-tuned modern vehicle will burn about a fifth of a litre of fuel, not very impressive math until we start to multiply by the number of cars and the number of minutes. On any given day this summer there was easily twenty-five cars lined up on either side of the bridge. Now we are at ten litres of fuel every ten minutes, if everyone is idling, or sixty litres an hour. The collective cost is starting to add up. Indeed we Canadians idle our cars an average of 75 million minutes every day!

> "If you're idling for more than ten seconds its best to turn it off."

But what is the environmental impact? Every litre of fuel burned produces about 2.4 kilograms of carbon dioxide, which is the main greenhouse gas that is causing climate change. Our lineup is producing 144 kilograms of greenhouse gas into the air every hour. Collectively, in Canada, we are idling our cars between 5 and 10 minutes a day. If we turned our engines off for just five minutes we would stop 1.6 million tonnes of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere every year.

So why don't we turn our engines off? For many of us it is because we don't understand the modern car engine and we remain convinced it is hard on the starter or a mechanically bad idea. Again the opposite is true. For a post 1970's vehicle, it is actually harder on the vehicle engine to idle than to restart the engine. This is because of the incomplete combustion of fuels and buildup in the cylinders. The maintenance cost of restarting the engine, for a modern vehicle is tagged at $10/yr. At a $1.40/litre the cost of idling for the same vehicle in Canada is $102.20. We save money, we save engine maintenance and we reduce pollution.

So what about our Bulkley Valley winters? What about warming up the engine? A modern vehicle, with its internal electronics, only requires about 30 seconds of warm up time and according to Natural Resources Canada it is actually far better for the mechanical parts to drive the car than to sit at idle. Where we live the best way to warm up a cold engine is with a block heater that you plug in for 1-2 hours before driving. In the Bulkley Valley we have the added incentive of reducing air pollution during cold inversions. One person consistently turning the engine off can keep 175 kg of carbon dioxide and up to 40 hazardous emissions including nasty particulate matter out of our valley air every year.

The math adds up. If you're idling your car for more than ten seconds, its best to turn it off.

In The Neighbourhood

Working with the Fraser Basin Council, the **City of Dawson Creek** pioneered a Green Vehicle Policy that consists of offering anti-idling workshops to all City staff in the fall of 2007. Anti-idling signage has been posted around City Hall and at other City facilities.

The **Town of Smithers** has very recently agreed to implement a similar anti-idling policy for its municipal fleet. It is also considering to make anti-idling a clause in any municipal contracts.

Both Dawson Creek and Smithers are participating in One Sky's Energetic Olympics, a competition between 16 BC communities to reduce their energy footprint. You can sign up today and earn points for your community.

Go to www.onesky.ca/energetic

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