

## **Vehicle Idling: The Road to Nowhere**

We've all done it: Left a vehicle running while a family member has run back into the house to grab a book or jacket ... or while stopping to chat briefly with a neighbor or friend ... or while listening to a song or story. No harm done, right?

Wrong.

Vehicle emissions are a major source of Belmont's greenhouse gas emissions (a primary contributor to climate change). Vehicle exhaust also contributes to air pollution and is a trigger for asthma, chronic bronchitis and other breathing disorders. Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of air pollution, as are the elderly.

### **Belmont's Cleaning the Air Campaign**

This past April, the town received a \$1,500 grant from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection to develop an anti-idling campaign. The grant provides road signs, fact sheets, and decals to use throughout town to raise awareness about the health and environmental problems associated with vehicle idling. Sustainable Belmont, a task force of the Vision 21 Implementation Committee, is working with the community to help implement this new Cleaning the Air Campaign.

Our Campaign has joined Greater Boston Breathes Better (GB3), a regional partnership between public, private and governmental entities that helps improve air quality in the greater Boston's area. This partnership promotes voluntary action to reduce air pollution from transportation and construction. To find out more about GB3 you can go to their web page at: [www.epa.gov/region1/eco/gb3](http://www.epa.gov/region1/eco/gb3)

### **Idling survey**

Last May, members of Sustainable Belmont conducted observational studies of idling behavior around Belmont schools. Through this exercise we observed many instances of parents idling while waiting to make sure their child got safely into the school or when picking up children at the end of the day. We plan to do another survey next spring, to see if there's been a change in this behavior.

### **Town Government Lends a Hand**

Receiving the unanimous approval and endorsement from the Belmont Board of Selectmen, Belmont's Cleaning the Air Campaign was off and running. Over the summer, Department of Public Works employees posted 30 road signs in areas identified as idling hot spots around town. These locations included each of the schools, parks, fields, and taxi stands at Waverly Square and Belmont Center.

Belmont School Superintendent Peter Holland recently sent a letter informing all parents and students about the importance of not idling around schools and has also encouraged school bus drivers to turn off their engines when not moving. (Bus exhaust is a major source of soot pollution.) And Belmont police officers are also helping to raise awareness by issuing warnings to drivers

about the state's five-minute maximum idling law. Belmont's Office of Community Development is making contractors aware of the law and the campaign has also received the support of the Belmont Health and Fire Departments.

### **Next Steps**

Reducing unnecessary vehicle idling is a positive development to help improve local air quality—but there's more that we can do. Also in the works: Encouraging the use of clean diesel technology in school buses and construction equipment where appropriate (clean diesel engines burn cleaner than gasoline) and making Belmont pedestrian friendly. In spring 2007, Sustainable Belmont hopes to team up with other community groups to form a Safe Routes to School (SRS) program, which encourages caregivers to walk, rather than drive, their children to school.

The bottom line? If we want cleaner air, it will be up to each of us to do our part. Walk or ride a bike when possible. Carpool with others, Combine errands in one trip. When you're not driving and are waiting in your car, turn off your engine. It's really that simple.

If you'd like to get involved with the Cleaning the Air Campaign, please send an email to Sustainable Belmont at [sustainablebelmont@gmail.com](mailto:sustainablebelmont@gmail.com).

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### **Idling Myths and Facts**

Take this short test drive to check your vehicle savvy (see answers at the bottom of the column).

1. True or false: During the winter, it's best to warm up your car's engine by leaving it to run for two or three minutes.
2. True or false: Every gallon of gas produces about 20 pounds of carbon dioxide when combusted.
3. True or false: If you're going to be parked for more than 10 seconds, it's better for your engine to turn it off.
4. True or false: Idling for a minute before turning off your engine can extend the life of your exhaust system.

### *Answers*

1. F. Today's cars only need 30 seconds of idling on a cold day to allow oil to circulate through the engine. Drive slowly until the engine is warm.
2. T. Carbon dioxide contributes to global warming.
3. T. Get in the habit of turning off your engine, even if parked for just a few seconds.
4. F. Idling allows water to condense in your exhaust, causing corrosion, and could reduce the life of the exhaust system.