

Idling vehicles are the devil's playground

During the winter in Edmonton, it's practically a way of life, but idling our cars is a habit we need to break—not just in terms of lowering CO₂ emissions, but for the sake of our own health as well



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As someone who routinely rides the bus, I'm well aware of how cold Edmonton's winters can get. As someone who occasionally drives, I'm also aware of how nice it can be to travel in the warmth of my own car. And as someone who's concerned about the environment, I'm aware that idling my car is completely unnecessary.

Not only is it unnecessary, it's harmful to the environment and our health as well. Unfortunately, not everyone sees it this way, but that's why it's so exciting that two Edmonton City Councillors—Michael Phair and David Thiele—are proposing a bylaw that would reduce engine idling in the city. The proposed bylaw would put Edmonton in the company of cities such as Toronto, Vancouver and even blue-collar Hinton.

Toronto's bylaw limits idling to under three minutes outside of schools and other "idling hot spots." This is a good start, but not nearly enough. Hinton allows cars to idle up to 15 minutes—perhaps

understandable during the winter, but in warmer weather that length of time is still unacceptable. In Vancouver, the bylaw states that your car cannot be left idling for more than three minutes out of 60, or while your car is unattended and unlocked.

Obviously what works in Vancouver won't translate perfectly to Edmonton. Since it gets significantly colder here, if nothing else it would make sense to have an exception for cold weather. I would propose that idling be limited to five minutes if the temperature is -10C or lower, and be banned completely if the temperature were warmer.

I do sympathize with those who get into cold cars in the morning to start their days, but it's not difficult to let your car warm up while driving it. If the drive is long enough, it won't take long for your car to become nice and toasty on the inside. And if it doesn't, odds are you've got a pretty short commute and not much to complain about.

But contrary to popular belief, idling is actually unnecessary and in no way good for your car's engine. In fact, idling for more than ten seconds uses more fuel than restarting your engine, and idling for two minutes uses the same amount of fuel as driving 1.6 kilometers (or one mile, if you prefer).

For those of you concerned about

warming up your engine before driving off, don't worry. Your car's engine needs no more than 30 seconds to warm up—and the best way to warm up the engine is to drive anyway.

In fact, it's been found that idling does your car more harm than good. Unwarranted idling damages engine parts and also causes build-up of fuel residues that, ironically enough, decrease engine efficiency.

Given these facts, being cold for a few minutes is a small price to pay for cleaner air and better health. According to Health Canada, over 5000 Canadians die each year as a result of air pollution, while thousands more fall ill, develop asthma and experience other, less detectable adverse effects. And while vehicle emissions are obviously not the only cause of air pollution, 55 per cent of Canadians identify them as a major contributor.

Hopefully the rest of Edmonton City Council has the foresight to pass the bylaw, but even if they don't, people should think twice about idling their vehicles while popping into shops for quick errands, getting food at a drive-through or warming up their cars.

When you come down to it, idling is a selfish and senseless habit: it's bad for your car, the environment and your health. So do us all a favour and switch off your engine—or better yet, walk, bike or take the bus.



KRYSTINA SULATYCKI

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