



Anti-Idling Policies and Children's Health

How to Protect Students from Diesel Exhaust

Every school day, more than 24 million children across the United States board a school bus to ride to school. Nearly 90% of these buses are powered by diesel fuel, and exhaust from these buses has been linked to serious health consequences in children. School buses provide a crucial service by transporting children, but it is critical that this service is provided in as safe a manner as possible. Fortunately, the adoption of an anti-idling policy is a simple way to improve the safety of school buses.

School Bus Exhaust

Diesel exhaust contains a variety of pollutants that have been linked to health problems for children. Short-term exposure has been shown to pose respiratory risks such as asthma exacerbation. Long-term exposure is linked to decreased lung function, cardiac disease, cancer, and other serious health problems. Some chemicals in diesel exhaust are also known endocrine disrupters and may play a role in developmental disorders.

Children can be exposed to diesel exhaust both when they are on or near an idling bus. Studies show that particulate matter levels can be four times higher for those on a bus than for those in a car driving in front of the bus. When buses idle while waiting to pick students up, exhaust levels around the bus and inside the bus rise to dangerous levels. Exhaust can also travel into school buildings if the idling buses are near an entranceway, window, or air intake for the ventilation system.

Reducing Harm From Diesel Exhaust

A number of tools are available to reduce the harm from diesel exhaust. Anti-idling policies are an option that many school districts and school bus fleet managers find appealing because of the ease of implementation. For no cost (actually often a savings due to reduced fuel consumption) and virtually no extra work, bus fleets can implement anti-idling policies that have a significant impact on children's health. Other options include alternative fuels and diesel retrofits. For more information on these strategies, you can visit www.cleanair.org/dieseldifference/.

For a step-by-step guide to implementing an anti-idling policy, see the reverse side of this sheet.

Implementing an Anti-Idling Policy

Clean Air Council staff can help with this process. Contact the Council at 215-567-4004 with any questions.

- 1) Look at the sample policy that the Council has produced. It can be found at www.cleanair.org/Transportation/idling/modelpolicy.htm. This document outlines the various options that are available. They range from simply defining a maximum idling time (such as 5 minutes) to adjusting bus parking and departure schedules. Use these as a guideline to draft a policy.
- 2) Decide how to implement the policy. Working with the school district and having it pass a formal School Board Resolution can be a powerful tool. Alternatively, simply adding a rule to the driver handbook can be the fastest way to implement a basic anti-idling policy.
- 3) Publicize the policy. Make sure that drivers know about the new policy. Signs should be placed in visible locations to remind drivers that idling is prohibited. Also, publicize the changes to the public. A press release can be a great way to generate good press in the community.
- 4) Be available to answer questions. Drivers will probably have questions about the new policy and how it affects them. To ensure successful implementation, make sure that drivers have the information they need. Remember, Clean Air Council staff can help by talking to drivers about the importance of reducing idling.

Anti-Idling Facts

More than 24 million children in the United States ride a bus to and from school every school day.

Diesel engines emit more than 75% of all the fine particulates from vehicles in the United States.

Idling wastes fuel and money.

Idling is harder on diesel engines than restarting or driving.

Modern diesel engines do not need to be warmed up more than the manufactures' recommended time (usually 5 minutes) except in extremely cold conditions.