

## A Good Law To Know and Follow: The Massachusetts Anti-Idling Statute

As the cold winter months arrive, many drivers warm up their car in the morning by letting it idle in their driveway; many leave the engine on while parked for short errands. In Massachusetts, this is illegal and can get you a fine of up to \$ 500 (first offense: \$ 100). In other states, you can be fined as much as \$ 1,000 for this practice.

The Massachusetts statute (Mass. General Laws, Ch. 90 sec. 16A) prohibits parked idling for more than five minutes, with certain exceptions (when a car is being serviced; when engine-assisted power is required for deliveries). Emergency vehicles (police, fire, medical services) are exempted as well.

Extended idling on school grounds is also prohibited by statute as well as by RMV regulations. These regulations (540 CMR 27) include very detailed provisions for idling in specific circumstances, such as: "If the exterior temperature is less than 35° F, then idling is allowed to heat the interior of any motor vehicle other than a school bus for a period or periods aggregating not more than one minute in any 15 minute period during which the motor vehicle is waiting to accept or discharge passengers."

Here are some of the many reasons why these rules and regulations make great sense and should be followed:

- **Idling is wasteful and expensive.** The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that the U.S. wastes six billion gallons of fuel per year through unnecessary idling.
- **Idling accelerates the climate crisis.** Burning this amount of fuel produces 60 million tons of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide per year.
- **Idling is toxic.** What comes out of your car exhaust includes sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, and volatile organic compounds. One minute of idling produces more carbon monoxide than three packs of cigarettes! Many respiratory and circulatory diseases are linked to air pollution from cars and trucks.
- **Idling is bad for your engine.** According to the California Energy Commission, "Fuel is only partially combusted when idling because an engine does not operate at its peak temperature. This leads to the build-up of fuel residues on cylinder walls that can damage engine components and increase fuel consumption." Today's cars warm up more efficiently anyway when they are driving than sitting in a driveway.

In Medfield, a coalition of churches, civic organizations and Town departments and committees has been conducting an initiative to inform residents of this law and the reasons for it. The Board of Selectmen voted unanimously to support this initiative and to authorize signs to put up on Town properties to remind drivers to turn off their engines when parking or waiting. Now, as winter approaches, it is time to think about our own driving habits: what can we do to help preserve our health and a living environment?