

Sustainable Belmont asks town to stop idling

By Cassie Norton
Staff Writer

Sustainable Belmont has achieved the first goal of its anti-idling campaign. As a result of Monday's Board of Selectmen meeting, the group will be hanging signs in key areas around town, especially near the schools and in parks, urging people not to let their cars idle.

"Idling is a very big issue. Our primary objective is one of awareness about the dangers of vehicle emissions to our environment and to ourselves," said Deb Lockett, a member of Sustainable Belmont, which is a subcommittee of the Vision 21 Implementation Committee.

The group's original goal was to display 46 blue "anti-idling zone" signs, as well as nine red and white signs warning of a fine of up to \$1,000 and citing Massachusetts laws regarding idling.

The signs were funded by a \$1,500 grant from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection.

The Massachusetts anti-idling law was passed in 2004. It states that no one may run an engine for more than five minutes, unless the vehicle is being serviced or needs the engine to power auxiliary systems, such as delivery trucks that require their engines to run refrigeration units. The fines may be no more than \$100 for a first offense and

no more than \$500 in subsequent cases.

In June of this year, Sustainable Belmont conducted observational research of the idling habits around schools and parks to establish where the signs should be located.

In a presentation at the meeting, Lockett said the worst idling transgressions occurred whenever people were waiting to pick up children, both at the end of the school day and during activities in the parks.

The selectmen unanimously voted to allow 30 blue signs.

Selectman Angelo Fierenze said the red and white signs were "threatening" and said the town should consider using them in the future if no significant decrease in idling is seen.

All three selectmen expressed their support of the program.

"We want this to work; we all support the initiative," said Selectman William Brownberger.

The group has engaged the help of Superintendent of Schools Dr. Peter Holland, who has agreed to send an informational letter to parents at the beginning of the school year, and include tips and reminders in school newsletters. Holland also said he will speak with the bus drivers to remind them of idling laws.

Sustainable Belmont also has

the support of Sgt. Ken Hamilton of the Police Department Traffic Division, who has agreed to prepare officers regarding the issuance of warnings and, in the future, tickets. Hamilton will also educate the officers regarding the "facts and myths of idling so that they may be more prepared to speak about the issues and understanding of ... the law," according to a letter from Sustainable Belmont to the selectmen.

During Monday's presentation, Lockett said she wanted to make it clear that the group had tried to use as few signs as possible while "providing coverage at target areas." She said the goal of the signs was to act as a reminder and "create awareness."

These signs are just the first step, however. After the Department of Public Works installs these signs and the school year gets under way, there will be a period of about nine months of citations for idling, culminating in a two- or three-week period of ticketing as a "shock to the system," Lockett said.

Additionally, the group is planning a "kick-off day" later in August, both to raise awareness and to celebrate those who have already taken steps to prevent air pollution. They will also be approaching local businesses regarding idling at delivery zones and by customers.

Reasons not to leave your engine running

Myth: The engine should be warmed up before driving.

Facts: • Idling is not an effective way to warm up a vehicle.

- Driving a vehicle is the best way to warm up an engine.
- An engine will be sufficiently warm after 30 seconds, even on a winter day.

Myth: Idling is good for your engine.

Facts: • Engines are designed to drive, not idle.

- Excessive idling can damage engine components including cylinders, spark plugs, and the exhaust system.
- Your engine is not working at peak operating temperature when it's idling, so fuel does not go through complete combustion.
- Idling allows water to condense in the exhaust system causing corrosion, and can reduce the life of the exhaust system.

Myth: Shutting off and restarting engine and uses more fuel.

Facts: • More than 10 seconds of fuel than restarting the engine.

- Frequent restarting has little engine components.
- Idling for a few minutes does not waste fuel and more minutes here and there that day can add up to more fuel wasted in a day.

Myth: Burning gasoline contributes about 20 pounds of carbon dioxide when combusted.

Facts: • Vehicle idling contributes in the local and community.

Source: Sustainable Belmont. For more information, contact sustainablebelmont@gmail.com.

Comment

Don't be idling

It's a familiar scene: A long line of cars, with parents waiting to drop off their children at school or play, or waiting to pick them up afterwards.

And each one of them spewing exhaust fumes.

Sometimes they're running their engines for just for a few minutes, sometimes for much longer.

A lot of people don't think about it. They think it's better to keep their engine going so they can run the heater, or air conditioner, or the radio.

They're wrong.

Excessive idling can damage your engine. Wasting gasoline costs you money. Burning gasoline produces carbon dioxide, which contributes to global climate change.

Most importantly to some people, all of that extra air pollution is dangerous to those with breathing problems.

Sustainable Belmont, a subcommittee of the town's Vision 21 Implementation Committee, is launching a campaign to encourage residents to think about their idling, and to curtail it. We applaud them. They are thinking globally and acting locally. They are also thinking locally, as excessive exhaust fumes damage the community as well as the planet.

A state law mandates five minutes maximum for idling. Fines can be up to \$100 for a first offense and \$500 for subsequent infractions.

The Belmont Police are going to be enforcing the law more consistently starting in September.

So please start thinking about changing this bad habit. When you're not driving, turn off your engine. It's better for you, your community and your planet.

