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Commission's message not just idle talk

Turning off the engine after 10 seconds protects young lungs

Like many residents of Leonia, Martha Lieblich is sometimes tempted to warm up her car in the driveway before heading out on a cold wintry day. But, as chair of the town's Environmental Commission, she's well aware of the damage that exhaust from idling car engines can cause to the health of children and other residents of Leonia. "Vehicle exhaust is the leading source of hazardous air pollution in our state," Lieblich explains.

Leonias school zones are a popular place for idling cars to line up to drop off or pick up students. Unfortunately, these are areas where idling can cause the greatest harm to children, who breathe in more exhaust because they are closer to tailpipe level and because they breathe at a faster rate than adults. Children breathe up to 50 percent more air per pound of body weight than adults. And those sitting inside their vehicles are not immune from the danger.

"When you're sitting in a line of idling vehicles, you and the baby in the back seat are probably breathing in more pollutants than those outside because the air intake of your car is facing directly into the tailpipe of the idling vehicle in front of you," says Lieblich.

Vehicle-related air pollution can cause asthma and other respiratory problems and allergies, and they also contribute to heart disease and higher cancer rates in high-traffic areas. About one out of every four school age children in New Jersey has asthma. It's the leading cause of school absenteeism and the third leading cause of hospitalization among children under the age of 15.

Not coincidentally air pollution rates in every county of New Jersey consistently exceed federal air quality standards and the state is ranked second in the nation for the number of smog days. In Leonia, air pollution is 50 percent worse than the statewide average.

That's why the Leonia Environmental Commission has mounted an awareness campaign to reduce transportation-related emissions. Avoiding idling is one simple way to address air pollution as well as greenhouse gases that contribute to global climate change. A NASA analysis found that motor vehicles are the greatest contributor to

atmospheric warming, and about a third of greenhouse gases produced in New Jersey come from transportation.

Idling is against the law...and unnecessary

State law already prohibits idling for longer than three minutes, but environmental experts strongly recommend turning off the engine whenever a vehicle is stopped for more than ten seconds.

“Many people have the outdated notion that warming up the engine is better for the car,” says Lieblich. “But today’s vehicles typically don’t need warming up more than 10 seconds. In fact, idling can actually damage the engine because fuel residues can form, contaminating engine oil and damaging engine parts. Idling can also cause water to condense in the vehicle’s exhaust.”

From an environmental standpoint, letting a vehicle idle more than 10 seconds typically uses more fuel than stopping and restarting the engine. Vehicles that idle 10 minutes per day waste more than 29 gallons of fuel each year, according to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, and an idling engine emits 20 times more pollution than a car traveling 30 miles per hour.

The Environmental Commission is encouraging all residents to turn off their engines whenever they are waiting:

- at a drive-through window,
- at the post office,
- when stalled in traffic for long periods,
- while gassing their cars,
- while picking up passengers, or
- any time they will be stopped for longer than ten seconds.

Local merchants should also ask vendors to turn off their truck engines while unloading.

Leonia’s all-volunteer Environmental Commission has seven members, appointed by the Mayor. Its mission is to be the watchdog of the town’s natural resources and promote sustainability. Commission projects include the **Walk Leonia** initiative, launched at the Leonia Health Fair last fall to encourage residents to reduce vehicle emissions by walking more and driving less.

“We have created a colorful new walking map of the Borough that will debut at Leonia Day on May 20,” says Commission Chair Martha Lieblich. “We hope everyone will stop by our information table, pick up a map and find out how fast and easy it is to get around our town on foot.

The Leonia Environmental Commission, one of the first environmental commissions in New Jersey, is appointed by the Mayor to advise the town on conservation, open space preservation, water resources, solid waste management and other environmental matters. The Commission meets on the first Wednesday of each

month at 7:30PM in the Committee Room of the Leonia Borough Hall, 312 Broad Avenue. The public is welcome to attend. For information call 201-592-7887, email mlieblich@leonianj.gov or visit the Environmental Commission page on the Borough's web site at www.leonianj.gov.

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References:

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- NJ Environmental Federation Idle Free NJ:
<http://www.cleanwateraction.org/feature/idlefreeenj>