

Anti-Idling Campaign to Protect Young Lungs

Air Quality Management assists Orange County Public Schools with an Anti-Idling Campaign to Protect Young Lungs

Have you ever left your car running while: Waiting to pick someone up? Running errands? Sitting at the drive through? Mobile source emissions are the number one cause of air pollution in Central Florida. In an effort to reduce respiratory ailments amongst school children, the Environmental Protection Division (EPD) has collaborated with Orange County Public Schools, the American Lung Association, Metroplan Orlando, and Orange County Commissioner Linda Stewart to institute “idle free” zones at the pick-up and drop-off locations at Shenandoah and Pine Castle Elementary Schools.

Anti-Idle signs have been placed at these schools and informational packets and pledge forms sent home to parents, asking them to refrain from idling while parked. Student volunteers were trained to patrol the Anti-Idle zones and look for idling vehicles. If an idling vehicle was observed, the time the vehicle remained idling was documented. The volunteers also recorded: the number of idling vehicles, the number of occupants in each vehicle, the activities drivers were engaged in while waiting (watching for child, reading, listening to radio), and the weather conditions at the time of the occurrence. Students also documented any obstacles they encountered in order to perfect this program.

The EPD provided teachers and their students with informative fact sheets listing the benefits of not idling and the health risks associated with it, as well as pledge cards for parents to sign indicating their agreement to reduce idling. Participating parents received a “turn the key - be idle free” window cling tag, which they were asked to display on their passenger-side window (indicating involvement in the program). Student monitors rewarded parents displaying their window cling tag by issuing them a colorful “turn the key – be idle free” key tag. An informational flyer was also sent home, as a gift to the student.

Idling data collected during the program, running from January to May of 2008, will be analyzed to determine if there were reductions in idle times. In addition to reduced emissions, participating schools will be officially recognized for their involvement and student volunteers will gain useful skills, including data collection, communication, and leadership.

Like driving, idling releases emissions into the air. Unlike driving, idling is unnecessary. An hour of automobile idling burns approximately 1/5 of a gallon of gasoline and releases nearly four pounds of carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the air. Excessive amounts of CO₂ in the atmosphere can lead to global warming. The next time you are running your engine while parked, remember to turn the key and be idle free. Not only will you be improving the air quality, you will also save up to five cents per minute.