How to Identify and Recruit Schools for Idling Reduction Programs

One of the simplest and most effective target markets to introduce an idling reduction program is at an elementary school. Children are frequently dropped off and picked up at school by their parents and guardians, a behavior that lends itself to idling behaviors. In addition, buses picking up and dropping off children and drivers delivering supplies add to the unnecessary idling on school grounds. Parents and the community are receptive and motivated to protect children and improve air quality. This behavior, once learned, can then be easily transferred to other locations such as drive-through windows, ATM machines, traffic delays, etc.

Ideally, a school-based program would launch with the school year. The weather is most conducive then, and it establishes a pattern for parents new to the school as well as those returning from the previous year. However, the launch of a new school year brings with it a great deal of work for the staff and an already overwhelming number of messages being sent to parents. Launching with the school year also requires the program to be in place prior to school closure in spring or during the summer break.

For these reasons, the program would optimally be implemented as early in the school year as feasible, while avoiding the first few weeks of school or a delay of so long that inclement weather patterns will have set in.

The principal of the school must be involved in the recruitment process; it is never too early to speak with the principal about the program. Ideally, contact the principal in the spring (April-May) about setting up a program the following fall. This allows them enough time to review the materials, inform other school leadership about the program and troubleshoot any obstacles that may arise.

When working with the principal it is very important to emphasize that the program is simple, and will not overburden the staff. School staff has a tremendous amount of responsibility both in and out of the classroom. In addition, they are already committed to doing a series of programs (which will vary by school). Remind the principal and staff that the idling reduction program is an important message that does not replace or add to existing curriculum requirements, and that this program has health benefits for staff as well as students and families. Having sample materials available for the principal and staff to review is helpful.