

# Cookbook with the Recipes and Ingredients to Create Your Own Idle-Free Zone

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*These documents and materials are provided free of charge courtesy of the Washington State Department of Ecology and the United States Environmental Protection Agency, in collaboration with Washington and Oregon air quality agencies.\* These materials are being made available in the hope of providing a tested foundation for others to effectively create and implement a successful idling reduction program.*

Excessive and unnecessary vehicle idling is a serious, avoidable contributor to environmental pollution and poor human health. Excessive idling is widespread in all types of vehicles, including cars, buses and trucks. This behavior occurs throughout virtually all transportation activities, including parents dropping off and picking up children before and after school, customers waiting in line at a drive-through ATM or restaurant, trucks delivering goods and buses waiting to pick up passengers.

Unnecessary idling significantly contributes to air pollution, which in turn worsens environmental and health problems, including contributing to the dramatic rise of childhood asthma.

In 2003, the Washington State Department of Ecology, in collaboration with Washington and Oregon air quality agencies, provided funding for a pilot program designed to decrease unnecessary vehicle idling. The group identified as most likely to change their behavior was parents of primary school age children. The pilot program took place at the “pick-up and drop-off” areas at the children’s schools.

The results from the 2003 pilot program proved behavior change could indeed occur. In 2004, the participating government agencies, with the help of the United States Environmental Protection Agency, sought to refine and test the program again in different places with different audience profiles. Using similar methods, the 2004 program once again proved that reducing unnecessary vehicle idling was possible.

The research, lessons learned, program formats and supporting materials developed during those two years are included for your use in the following toolkit.

The program and materials have been designed to be easy to use and to produce real reductions in emissions. There are three (3) basic recipes to follow; however, feel free to “borrow” ingredients from each to create your own masterpiece!

To access the ingredients in the recipes, please click on the recipe’s title which is in bold and underlined. To access any other materials in this

toolkit, please return to the toolkit index and click on the document desired.

### **Compact Plan**

A detailed description of the Compact Plan is listed below. Main “ingredients” of the program are as follows:

- Five-day program – targeting classrooms
- Signage
- Idling fact sheets, pledge forms

This plan provides a “streamlined” method for implementing an idling reduction program at one elementary school.

Some steps recommended in the plan include installing idling reduction signs in the drop-off/pick-up area of the chosen school and sending idling reduction fact sheets home to the parents, as well as having participants sign a pledge form. In this plan, you will not observe or record any idling behavior. Also, you will not use any incentives as provided in other plans (see medium and full-sized plans). It must be noted, however, that in two years of testing, incentives proved to be invaluable in obtaining response from parents, and an important element in achieving behavior change (i.e., measurable idling reduction). In summary, while this model may be effective in changing idling behaviors, the lack of incentives might lead to less participation.

### **Medium Plan**

A detailed description of the Medium Plan is listed below. Main “ingredients” of the program are as follows:

- Ten-day program – two five day segments – targeting classrooms, bus drivers & delivery drivers  
Monitoring/Data Collection
- Signage
- Idling fact sheets, pledge forms, measurement forms
- Thank you and incentives such as key chains

In this plan, choose one elementary school and record idling behavior of parents for five consecutive days.

Parents of children at the participating school receive idling reduction packets containing a letter about the program, fact sheet and pledge forms. These materials are sent home with the students the week prior to the start date of monitoring idling behavior. Parents and students are asked to read the idling reduction message, and sign and return the pledge forms within a five-day time period. (Click on recipe title or see index for sample templates.)

When the students bring back the signed pledge form, the teacher hands them another envelope which contains an idling reduction key chain (see index for example) or other idling reduction incentive, as well as a discount coupon from a participating local merchant.

Each participating schoolteacher is briefed on the program through a letter that clearly outlines the process and goals of the program. If a predetermined number of students in a classroom (past programs have used a goal of an 80 percent response rate) return a signed pledge form, then the classroom will earn a reward such as a pizza or ice cream party.

Teachers in classrooms meeting the goal will also receive an award such as a coffee shop gift card or movie tickets.

In addition to outreach efforts to students and parents, idling reduction signs are posted in the drop-off/pick-up area(s) of the school (see index for example). These signs help to spread the idling reduction message and serve as a reminder for parents and guardians to turn off their vehicle while dropping off and picking up students.

### **Delivery Driver Outreach**

The front office staff at the school is asked to provide idling reduction materials to delivery drivers (mail, food, supplies) who frequent the school. The delivery drivers are asked to sign an idling reduction pledge form. When the driver returns a signed pledge form, they receive a thank you letter, idling reduction key chain or other messaging/incentive tool, and a discount coupon from a participating local merchant. (Click on recipe title or see index for sample templates.)

### **Bus Driver Outreach**

To further expand the idling reduction message, idling reduction fact sheets and pledge forms are sent to the transportation director who oversees the school district's bus drivers. Bus drivers are asked to sign the idling reduction pledge. If they return a signed pledge, they will receive a thank you letter, idling reduction key chain or other messaging tool, and a discount coupon from a participating local merchant. (Click on recipe title or see index for sample templates.) Sample language is also provided for those schools or bus companies that do not currently have written idling reduction policies.

### **Measuring Idling Levels**

Volunteers or temporary staff will need to be recruited to measure vehicle idling times during the course of the program. These "research staff" will use a form (click on recipe title or see index for sample templates) to track how long parents (not buses or delivery drivers) idle their cars while dropping off or picking up students. Research staff will also be asked to record weather conditions, the type of vehicle idling (e.g., passenger car,

SUV, mini-van), and any other notable factors such as whether anyone else is in the vehicle.

Copies of the tracking form, clipboards, pens and stopwatches should be provided for use during the program and left with the school's front office staff. Research staff will be asked to check in with the school's front desk to pick up and drop off their supplies.

**Phase 1:** Before the classroom notices go home, two to three monitors track idling behavior for five days.

**Phase 2:** After the classroom notices are returned, two to three monitors track idling behavior for five days.

Following the conclusion of the second five-day time period (i.e., information has gone home to parents, signs are installed, etc.), evaluation teams return to the school to record and observe the idling behavior for five more consecutive days to see if your efforts had an effect on behavior.

The advantage to this method is that it includes a "before and after" snapshot at one school. A potential drawback to this method is the possibility of a dramatic change in weather, which can influence idling behaviors and affect your results.

### **Full-Size**

A detailed description of the Full-Size Plan is listed below. Main "ingredients" of the program are as follows:

- Five-day program - targeting classrooms, bus drivers & delivery drivers
- Control and participating schools
- Monitoring/Data collection
- Third party partners
- Signage
- Idling fact sheets, pledge forms, measurement forms
- Media templates
- Thank you and incentives such as key chains
- Published results

In this scenario, two similarly sized and located schools within a school district are recruited. One school will act as the control school (a school that does not receive the anti-idling materials), and the other as the participating school. The suggested duration for the monitoring is five consecutive days.

## **Control School Outreach**

At the control school, idling behavior is not influenced. However, during the course of the monitoring, idling behavior is observed and recorded. It is essential to observe and record data during afternoon pick-up times. If resources are available, it is also preferred, but not essential, to observe and record idling behavior during student drop-off times in the morning.

## **Participating School Outreach**

The second school is designated as the participating school. Parents of children at the participating school receive idling reduction packets containing a letter about the program, fact sheet, and pledge forms. These materials are sent home with the students the week prior to the program dates. Parents and students are asked to read the idling reduction message, and sign and return the pledge forms. (Click on recipe title or see index for sample templates.)

When the students bring back the signed pledge form, the teacher hands them another envelope which contains an idling reduction key chain (see index for example) or other idling reduction incentive, as well as a discount coupon from a participating local merchant.

Each participating school teacher is briefed on the program through a letter that clearly outlines the process and objectives of the program. If a predetermined number of students in the classroom (past programs have used a goal of an 80 percent response rate) return a signed pledge form, then the classroom will earn a reward such as a pizza or ice cream party. Teachers in classrooms meeting the predetermined goal will also receive an award such as a coffee shop gift card or movie tickets.

In addition to outreach efforts to students and parents, idling reduction signs are posted in the drop-off/pick-up area(s) of the school (see index for example). These signs help to spread the idling reduction message and serve as a reminder for parents and guardians to turn off their vehicle while dropping off and picking up students.

## **Delivery Driver Outreach**

The front office staff at the participating school is also asked to provide delivery drivers who frequent the school (e.g., mail services and food and supply providers) with idling reduction materials. The delivery drivers are asked to sign an idling reduction pledge form. When the driver returns a signed pledge form, they receive a thank you letter, idling reduction key chain or other messaging/incentive tool, and a discount coupon from a participating local merchant. (Click on recipe title or see index for sample templates.)

## Bus Driver Outreach

To further expand the idling reduction message, idling reduction fact sheets and pledge forms are sent to the transportation director who oversees the school district's bus drivers. Bus drivers are asked to sign the idling reduction pledge. If they return a signed pledge, they will receive a thank you letter, idling reduction key chain or other messaging tool, and a discount coupon from a participating local merchant. (Click on recipe title or see index for sample templates.) Sample language is also provided for those schools or bus companies that do not currently have written idling reduction policies.

## Measuring Idling Levels

Volunteers or temporary staff will need to be recruited to measure vehicle idling times during the course of the program for both the control and participating schools. Research staff will use a measurement form (click on recipe title or see index for sample templates) to track how long parents (not buses or delivery drivers) idle their cars while dropping off or picking up students. Research staff will also be asked to record weather conditions, the type of vehicle idling, and any other notable factors.

Copies of the measurement form, clipboards, pens and stopwatches should be provided for use during the program and sent to the front office staff for the school. Research staff or volunteers will be asked to check in with the school's front desk to pick up and drop off their supplies.

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