



# — I TURN IT OFF — ANTI-IDLING TOOLKIT

## HOW TO REDUCE IDLING IN YOUR COMMUNITY

*Presented by Sustainable America*



**SUSTAINABLE**  
— A M E R I C A —

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## ABOUT SUSTAINABLE AMERICA

Sustainable America is an environmental 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with the mission to make the nation's food and fuel systems more efficient and resilient. Through broad public education we work to reduce oil usage and increase food availability in the United States. Increasing fuel efficiency in the technologies we already use and introducing conservation into our daily routines can have a meaningful effect on the effort to reduce our nation's oil consumption.



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[SUSTAINABLEAMERICA.ORG](http://SUSTAINABLEAMERICA.ORG)

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# INTRODUCTION

## WHY SHOULD WE TURN IT OFF?

In the United States, nearly 4 million gallons of fuel (enough to fill five Olympic-size swimming pools!) is wasted every day as a result of vehicle idling. All this unnecessary idling is bad for our health, bad for the environment, and most of all, bad for our wallets. Individually, we each waste two to four tanks of gasoline per year, just by idling.

Most people don't mean to be so wasteful — they just don't really even think about it. They may be following the outdated notion that restarting your car wastes more gas than letting it run. Once you point out the facts to a driver, they're usually more than willing to change their behavior. With that in mind, we've put together some steps you can take to raise awareness about this important issue. Help us make turning off your engine rather than idling as commonplace as wearing your seat belt!

## ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit is for anyone looking for a way to get involved and make a positive impact on their community and environment. We have assembled the best tools, advice, and resources we've developed since launching the #ITurnItOff anti-idling campaign ([iturnitoff.com](http://iturnitoff.com)) in 2013 and put them in one package. In this document, you will find lots of creative ideas for taking action on your own or in groups to help reduce vehicle idling. In the accompanying "Printable Resources" folder, you will find printable tools to support your efforts.



# JUST THE FACTS

## IDLING GETS US NOWHERE

It happens, we know. You're picking up a friend, waiting for a food order, or just trying to warm up your car on a cold morning — and you leave your car running for a little while. It's easy to let those minutes tick by, but getting into the habit of turning your car off when you'll be idle for more than 10 seconds can make a big difference. Here's why:

### **Idling for more than 10 seconds wastes more fuel than restarting.**

Due to changes in vehicle technology, letting a vehicle idle for more than 10 seconds burns more fuel and emits more CO<sub>2</sub> than turning it off and restarting, according to research by Argonne National Laboratory.

### **3.8 million gallons of fuel is wasted by unnecessary idling every day in the U.S.**

If you idle for 5 minutes warming up your car in the morning, 3 minutes at the bank drive-thru, and 4 minutes checking messages in your driveway, you've burned enough gas to drive 6 miles. Put another way, each driver in America buys two to four tanks of gasoline per year that isn't used to get to their destinations. You waste money when you sit idle.

### **Idling emits dangerous pollutants.**

If wasting money doesn't bother you, the health implications of idling should. Idling creates a hot spot of dangerous pollutants for everyone near your idling car, including you. These emissions include nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, and particulate matter. Breathing these pollutants is linked to increases in asthma, allergies, heart and lung disease, and cancer. Children are especially vulnerable because they inhale more air per pound of body weight.

These pollutants are also dangerous to passengers inside an idling vehicle. Car manufacturers even point this out in *their manuals*. The 2015 Chrysler 200 manual, for example, warns, "Never run the engine in a closed area, such as a garage, and never sit in a parked vehicle with the engine running for an extended period of time." The 2014 Ford Fusion manual tells drivers to open the windows and set climate control to outside air if they are going to idle for long periods.

### **Idling contributes to climate change.**

The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that the idling of personal vehicles generates annually about 30 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub>, a significant contributor to climate change. Eliminating those emissions through idling reduction would be like removing 6 million cars from the roads.

### **Idling is hard on your vehicle.**

Idling can damage engine components. When idling, a vehicle's fuel is only partially combusted because the engine isn't at peak temperature. This causes fuel residue to build up on cylinder walls, which can damage engine components and increase fuel consumption. And contrary to popular opinion, restarting instead of idling will not excessively wear out your starter.

### **Idling during cold weather is not a good way to warm up your car.**

Try to resist the temptation to warm up your car on a cold morning. Not only could the cabin air become contaminated with pollutants, but your car prefers to warm up on the go. Even at cold temperatures, vehicles will reach ideal operating temperatures more quickly while driving versus idling. Don't just take our word for it; here's what Ford says in one of its manuals: "Idling in cold weather does not heat the engine to its normal operating temperature. Long periods of idling, especially in cold weather, can cause a buildup of deposits which can cause engine damage."

***Note:** It is not recommended to turn a vehicle off at stop lights. If you will be stopped longer, like at a railroad crossing, drawbridge, or construction site, we recommend turning off your engine.*

## HOW TO INFLUENCE FRIENDS, FAMILY AND OTHER DRIVERS

If you want to make a difference on the idling issue, a great place to start is with your own network of friends, family, and community members. By setting an example and educating them about the issue, you will certainly impact those around you.

### Start in Your Own Car

If you drive a car, your passengers will likely notice if you turn off your car in situations most people idle, like in a drive-thru or driveway. You can explain it by saying, “I always turn off my car when I’m not moving. It’s such a waste of gas to idle!” That will open up a discussion, and you can share more of the facts from Page 2.

### Get Social

Become an idling influencer by sharing your enthusiasm for the issue with your online networks. You can use the facts from Page 2 or share some of the online resources from [iturnitoff.com](http://iturnitoff.com).

Make sure to tailor your message to your audience. Your Facebook friends might be more interested in how idling less can save money, while neighbors on NextDoor might respond more to an air quality message. Here are some sample messages:

- Idling for 10+ seconds wastes more fuel than restarting. Pledge to stop idling at [iturnitoff.com](http://iturnitoff.com). #iturnitoff
- 2 min spent idling = 1 mile of driving. Save gas, save our air. #iturnitoff [iturnitoff.com](http://iturnitoff.com)
- Help clear the air for kids. Pledge to stop #idling at [iturnitoff.com/schools](http://iturnitoff.com/schools) #iturnitoff
- Find out how much money you can save by cutting down on idling at [iturnitoff.com](http://iturnitoff.com).

### Write an Editorial in Your Local Newspaper

Another way to reach people in your community is by writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. The letter to the editor section is one of the most read sections of the newspaper.

Again, make sure to tailor your message to your community. If air quality is poor in your area, cite those statistics and urge people to help improve the air by being mindful about idling. If you see long lines at drive-thrus, suggest that people save time and gas money by going inside to bank or buy food. Here are some other tips:

- Keep your letter short and to the point.
- Use a mix of facts and a personal story. How does this issue affect you?
- If you can connect the issue to a previous article in the paper, chances are higher of getting it published.
- Include your full name, address, and phone number.

# TAKING ACTION

## HOW TO INFLUENCE FRIENDS, FAMILY AND OTHER DRIVERS (CONTINUED)

### Engage With Other Drivers

Once you become aware of unnecessary idling you will undoubtedly start to see idlers everywhere. If you are up to the task, why not knock on a few windows and ask drivers to consider turning off their engines? Before you do, make sure you read through these tips for engaging with other drivers.

#### BE SAFE!

Your safety is of paramount importance so be smart about who you approach and when. It is always best to approach drivers during the day, in well-lit, busy areas. Be polite and make sure not to interrupt someone in the middle of a phone conversation. Common courtesy will go a long way in ensuring you have a positive encounter.

#### BE PREPARED

Being armed with information and facts will definitely help your cause. Make sure to read up on your state, city or town's idling laws. If your area does not have an idling law in place, do not despair! Being armed with key idling facts from Page 2 like "10 seconds of idling wastes more fuel than restarting" is just as powerful.

Carrying and distributing flyers with information on idling laws and facts is also helpful. You can print out the Windshield Flyer or Idling Ticket from the Printable Resources folder.

#### WHAT DO I SAY?

If your state, city or town has an idling law you could say, "Excuse me, but are you aware that our [state, city, or town] has an idling law?" Alternatively you could say, "Excuse me for bothering you, but would you mind turning off your engine?" and then explain why. Depending on your audience or where you live, you can highlight the negative health effects of vehicle idling, the financial waste, the environmental impacts or other facts and figures that resonate most with you.

When someone agrees to shut off their engine, make sure to thank them. If the driver seems especially receptive to your message, you could also ask them to spread the word and share what they learned with others.

Idling Ticket



Windshield Flyer





# TAKING ACTION

## LAUNCH A COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN

A good way to reach a lot of people with the anti-idling message is to launch an anti-idling campaign in your city or neighborhood or at your school, workplace, or place of worship. It can be as simple as posting signs to raise awareness or a larger effort to enact no-idling policies where you live, work, or play. Encourage others to get on board for a safer and healthier community for all!

### Schools

Schools are a great place to raise awareness about the dangers of idling. Doing so will help make them healthier places for kids, teachers, and staff.

Air monitoring at schools typically finds “hot spots” of air pollution during pick-up times. One of the main sources is exhaust from idling vehicles as parents wait to pick up their kids. Vehicle exhaust is linked to increases in asthma, allergies, heart and lung disease, and even cancer. Children are especially at risk because their lungs are still developing and they inhale more air per pound of body weight than adults.

Idling is a great issue for school environmental clubs or committees, scout troops, and parent organizations to get involved with. Here are some ideas:

- Write a letter or share our school idling video in school newsletters or social media channels: [vimeo.com/215250033](https://vimeo.com/215250033)
- Ask school administrators to develop a no-idling policy and add it to your school’s handbook.
- Print a poster to hang on school bulletin boards (see Printable Resources folder).
- Organize a pledge drive (see page 6).
- Organize a film screening (see page 7).
- Post signs in places drivers tend to idle. Some state environmental protection agencies offer free or low-cost anti-idling signs. (See Further Resources on page 10.)
- Organize an idling poster contest. (Read about a contest in Utah [on our blog](#).)

For a more school anti-idling campaign ideas and resources, check out the EPA’s Idle Free Schools Toolkit:

[epa.gov/healthy-schools-healthy-kids/idle-free-schools-toolkit-healthy-school-environment](https://epa.gov/healthy-schools-healthy-kids/idle-free-schools-toolkit-healthy-school-environment)

### Workplaces or Places of Worship

There are many ways to build awareness about idling in your work or worship community.

- Submit a letter or article to your company newsletter or church bulletin.
- Post a link to [iturnitoff.com](https://iturnitoff.com) to a social media group asking people to join you in pledging to stop idling.
- Post signs in places drivers tend to idle. Some state environmental protection agencies offer free or low-cost anti-idling signs (See Further Resources on page 10.)
- Print a poster to hang on a community or break-room bulletin board (see Printable Resources folder.).
- Organize a pledge drive (see page 6).
- Organize a film screening (see page 7).

If your workplace has a fleet of vehicles, there may be more you can do. Reducing idling can save a business money, so there is good incentive to make improvements in this area. Does your workplace have an idling policy for drivers? Educating drivers about idling and developing idling guidelines are good places to start. Here are some helpful resources:

- Sample workplace idling policies: [fleetanswers.com/content/toolkit-and-policies-idle-education](https://fleetanswers.com/content/toolkit-and-policies-idle-education)
- U.S. Department of Energy’s Idlebox toolkit: [cleancities.energy.gov/technical-assistance/idlebox/](https://cleancities.energy.gov/technical-assistance/idlebox/)
- 7 technologies that can slash idling: [sustainableamerica.org/blog/7-technologies-that-can-slash-idling/](https://sustainableamerica.org/blog/7-technologies-that-can-slash-idling/)

## HOW TO ORGANIZE A PLEDGE DRIVE

If you are inspired to share what you have learned about vehicle idling with others and want to encourage them to join you in taking action, consider hosting an anti-idling pledge drive. This page provides a quick overview of the basic steps in organizing a successful pledge drive in your community.

### 1. FIND A LOCATION

There are many different locations that could be great spots for a pledge drive including school or workplace cafeterias, driving schools (a great spot to reach new drivers early!), farmers markets/craft markets, community events, after-school programs, libraries, church gatherings — really any high-traffic area where people will have the time and capacity to stop, learn, and pledge. All you need is a spot to put a small table (and possibly a tent if you are outdoors). You can also have people walking around with clipboards instead of setting up a spot with a laptop or tablet, or ideally do both! The main point is to find a high-traffic and highly visible location where you can reach the largest number of people.

### 2. RECRUIT VOLUNTEER HELP

When engaging crowds, it is always a good idea to have at least one other person on hand to help you talk to interested parties, answer questions and take pledges. A volunteer will also be a big help in setting up and tearing down after an event or covering your table when you take a break. Whatever the task may be, it is always a good idea to have some extra help at hand.

### 3. GATHER PLEDGES

Once you are set up to attract prospective pledgers, make sure you are ready and able to collect their names and information. Whether you have a tablet, computer, or a clipboard, it is important that people have a place to put their name, email address and ZIP code.

Online pledges can be collected at: [iturnitoff.com/pledgedrive.html](http://iturnitoff.com/pledgedrive.html). Printable pledge sheets are included in the Printable Resources folder of this toolkit. Be sure to congratulate new pledgers.

### 4. EDUCATE YOUR COMMUNITY

Whether your pledge-drive station has infographics or you give out a brochure, make sure pledgers know what they are signing up for. People will not give out their information unless they understand the cause. Make sure you give them something to take home as a reminder. There are several options included in the Printable Resources section of this toolkit.



## HOW TO HOST A FILM SCREENING

If you are moved to share what you have learned about vehicle idling with others, consider hosting a screening of the documentary film *Idle Threat: Man on Emission* – the story of George Pakenham, a New York City activist who goes around the city spreading the word about idling by knocking on one car window at a time. Documentary films are a powerful way to communicate information to large groups of people at once and to inspire others to take action. This guide will provide you with the information needed to plan and host a film screening in your community.

### 1. FIND A LOCATION

There are plenty of public and private spaces that would be open to hosting a film screening. Your local library is a great place to start. If your library already has a film program, ask them to add *Idle Threat* to their movie list. If not, ask if they would be willing to host a screening. Cinemas both small and large are often willing to take on documentary film screenings as part of their community initiatives; contact the cinema manager to inquire. Public parks, community centers, schools, non-profit offices, co-working spaces, and art galleries are also great locations. Consider the assets in your community and get creative!

### 2. DETERMINE YOUR EQUIPMENT NEEDS

Once you have secured a location, you may need to secure some equipment to show the film. If you're working with a cinema or library, they will probably have everything you need. If you plan to screen the film in a public park, however, you will need to secure a projector and screen, possibly chairs (unless you make the event bring-your-own seating), a table for informational handouts, snacks, etc.

### 3. SECURE THE FILM

Depending on who will be purchasing the film and how many people you expect to attend, different screening licenses are available. Visit [videoproject.com/Idle-Threat.html](http://videoproject.com/Idle-Threat.html) to determine the right license and get registered to screen.

### 4. ADVERTISE, ADVERTISE, ADVERTISE!

Once you have your location, equipment and screening license secured, it's time to fill the seats. Depending on your location, ask if they have a newsletter that goes out to their network and if they will promote your movie in it or offer a spot to advertise the screening. If your public location has a website, ask if they can promote your screening online. Place an ad of your own in a local newspaper and hang up posters in high visibility spots around town. Libraries, government offices, coffee shops, grocery stores and schools often provide community boards where you can post flyers and information. Promote at public locations and nearby colleges to draw the most attention. Consider reaching out to a local radio station to help get the word out. The more you advertise the better, so don't be shy, and get creative!

## HOW TO HOST A FILM SCREENING (CONTINUED)

### 5. DON'T JUST ADVERTISE; ADVERTISE WELL

Now that you know where to advertise, try to sell your movie. Some people will naturally be inclined to attend your film screening, while others may need more of an incentive. You can offer door prizes, a raffle, coupons, or invite local celebrities or government leaders to get involved. Free refreshments are often a great and easy incentive as well. If you have a strict budget, see if the location of the screening can pitch in, or ask local businesses to sponsor or make donations.

### 6. HOST AN AFTER-PARTY

After *Idle Threat* finishes, do not let people leave with questions. Host a post-screening discussion or Q&A. Consider arranging a panel of local anti-idling allies and experts, or even invite George Pakenham to attend and speak about his movie and the issue of idling first-hand! E-mail: [george@verdantvigilante.com](mailto:george@verdantvigilante.com) to inquire about speaking opportunities. You, as the host (or hosts) of the film screening, can also lead a robust idling discussion.

Since you want people to not only learn but also take action, set up a table and encourage people to immediately SIGN THE PLEDGE to stop idling unnecessarily (See "How to Organize a Pledge Drive" on Page 6).

Hand out infographics to each person who shows up so that they can keep the information fresh in their minds and share it with others. Several options are available in the Printable Resources folder.

Consider using this opportunity to form a local anti-idling action group and recruit interested individuals to take part. Documentary films can be a great way to inspire action, and you'll want to seize this opportunity to engage with others who share your passion for change in your community.

### 7. DON'T FORGET TO FOLLOW UP!

If you've had a successful screening, make sure to use the event as a springboard to spread the word. Send a short article to your local paper noting how many attendees you had, how many pledges were signed and how many people signed up to take part in your local anti-idling action group. Note interesting questions, comments or discussion points from the Q&A session. Invite local leaders who attended the film to provide a quote. Make sure to also take this opportunity to thank anyone who helped along the way.

# TAKING ACTION

## GET INVOLVED WITH GOVERNMENT

To help curb the health and environmental hazards of idling, more than two dozen states and many municipalities have anti-idling regulations in place. Many of these regulations target large commercial vehicles and don't include passenger vehicles. A handful of states — Connecticut, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Vermont — stipulate fines for passenger vehicle idling, according to data collected by the U.S. Department of Energy (see the full "Idlebase" list here: [https://cleancities.energy.gov/files/docs/idlebox\\_idlebase\\_database.xlsx](https://cleancities.energy.gov/files/docs/idlebox_idlebase_database.xlsx)).

Here are some examples of fines for vehicle idling around the country:

- **Las Vegas:** \$10,000 maximum fine for idling a diesel truck or bus more than 15 consecutive minutes
- **Hawaii:** 3 minutes of idling will cost you \$25 to \$2,500.
- **Denver:** 5 minutes of idling in an hour will bring a fine of \$150 to \$999.
- **District of Columbia:** 3 minutes of idling carries a \$1,000 fine.

The DOE points out in the Idlebase document that idling laws are surprisingly variable: "While one city might limit the idling of 'vehicles,' another city might regulate the idling of 'diesel-fueled commercial vehicles weighing more than 26,000 lb (gross vehicle weight),' and another city might limit the idling of 'large trucks on State Street.' Evidence of the complicated landscape of idling restrictions, the most variable category is 'Exemptions.' Often—even usually—the law's exemptions are longer than the law itself."

### Engage with Local Government

If you would like to see anti-idling regulations enacted or strengthened in your area, begin by researching anti-idling laws, ordinances, and policies in your town, city, and/or state. [Find a list here:

[https://cleancities.energy.gov/files/docs/idlebox\\_idlebase\\_database.xlsx](https://cleancities.energy.gov/files/docs/idlebox_idlebase_database.xlsx)] If these are in place, are they being enforced? Are there opportunities that you see for improvement? Develop a set of recommendations and identify the appropriate person/s to meet with in your community. Identify potential allies such as like-minded local environmental or health organizations.

For inspiration, read how [\*a student in Connecticut convinced his town adopt a no-idling resolution\*](#).

### Tell Your Legislators that Idling Is an Important Issue

More than half of U.S. states and the District of Columbia have anti-idling laws in place. While this is a great start, all states should have laws against this harmful practice. A national law would likely be best, as inconsistency in rules makes compliance difficult for drivers, particularly long-distance drivers like truckers. Also, in recent years several car manufacturers have started offering automatic start-stop anti-idling technology in their vehicles. Like higher MPG legislation, this technology could be mandated, which would significantly cut down on unnecessary idling times.

### In New York City, Citizens Can Report Idling

Laws and regulations are a good start to solving the problem, but in order to make an impact, they need to be enforced, which is rarely the case. New York City made its anti-idling laws more strict in 2009 but then was criticized for loosely enforcing them. In a city that was issuing some 10 million parking tickets every year, it was only issuing a few thousand idling tickets despite the fact that the rules are so frequently violated. New York idling activist George Pakenham pushed for an amendment that would allow citizens to help enforce the law. Now, citizens can document idling violators and submit a complaint form. If the idler ends up getting a fine, the person who reported it receives 25% of the fine, which could be from \$300 to \$2,000.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

### TOOLKITS

#### **EPA Idle Free Schools Toolkit**

<https://www.epa.gov/healthy-schools-healthy-kids/idle-free-schools-toolkit-healthy-school-environment>

Resources for running an idling reduction campaign at a school. Includes resources for a student-run science or community involvement project.

#### **Clean Cities Coalition Network IdleBox Toolkit**

<https://cleancities.energy.gov/technical-assistance/idlebox/>

Toolkit of print products, templates, presentations, and resources to assist with idle-reduction projects for fleets with light-, medium-, and heavy-duty vehicles.

#### **Campaign for Clean Air**

<http://www.campaignforcleanair.org/turn-it-off.html>

Program and resources for schools and heavy duty vehicles developed in North Carolina.

### REPORTS AND RESEARCH

#### **Argonne National Laboratory Idling Research**

<https://www.anl.gov/es/reducing-vehicle-idling>

#### **DOE Vehicle Technology Office**

<https://www.energy.gov/eere/vehicles/idle-reduction>

**“Idling Gets You Nowhere: The Health, Environmental and Economic Impacts of Engine Idling in New York City.”**  
Environmental Defense Fund, 2009.

<https://www.edf.org/attention-drivers-turn-your-idling-engines>

### SIGNAGE

#### **ComplianceSigns.org**

<https://www.compliancesigns.com/signs/No-Idling>

# PRINTABLE RESOURCES

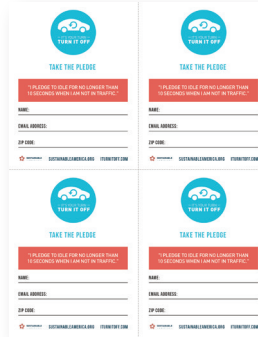
## LIST OF RESOURCES

The download of this toolkit includes a folder of printable resources you can use to support a range of anti-idling awareness-building efforts. Here's a snapshot of what's included:



### Idling Ticket

Keep these educational “tickets” handy in your glove compartment to leave on windshields of idling vehicles.



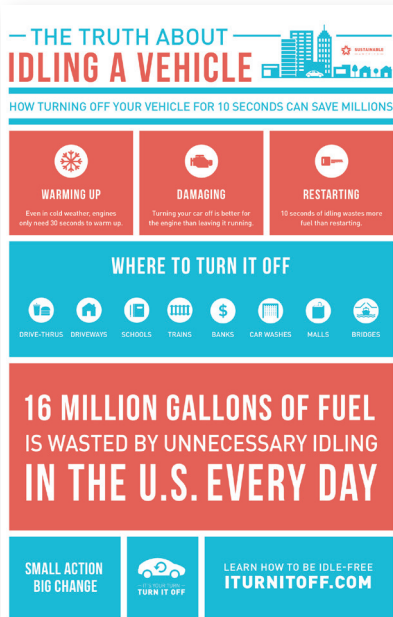
### Idling Pledge Form

Use this form to collect pledges to stop idling at community events.



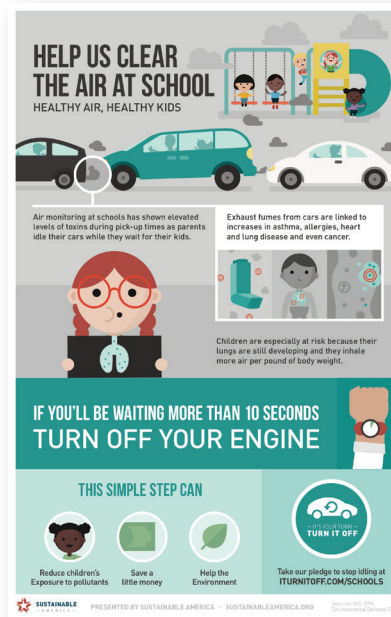
### Windshield Flyer

Inspire others to take action against unnecessary idling with this informational flyer.



### Idling Poster

Educate your community about idling by hanging this poster at your workplace, local coffee shop, school or community bulletin board.



### School Idling Poster

Educate your school community about idling by hanging this poster in high visibility places.