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Reducing idling in Ottawa

Spare Our Air – Reducing idling in Ottawa

What is idling? Idling happens when your car's gas-powered engine is running but the vehicle is not moving. Most of the time idling is simply a bad habit: waiting to pick up a child, pre-heating your vehicle, or sitting in your driveway listening to the end of a song. It wastes fuel (and money), causes air pollution and is harmful to our health.

The City of Ottawa's [Idling Control \(By-law No. 2007-266\)](#) prohibits idling for more than three minutes in any 60-minute period when the outdoor temperature is between 5 °C and 27 °C. But in any temperature or situation, idling should be kept to a minimum.

Tips to avoid idling

Beyond the by-law, idling is a bad idea because it's your hard-earned money coming out of the tailpipe. It doesn't matter how fuel efficient your vehicle is, it gets zero kilometres per litre while idling.

Here are some tips to avoid idling:

- Always dress for the outdoor temperature, even if you're doing a quick trip, so you don't have to idle in case you are delayed.
- Unless it is below – 15 °C your vehicle doesn't need more than 30 seconds to circulate the oil and become fully lubricated and ready to go. Your vehicle warms up best by driving it, assuming the windshield is defrosted (a good scraper helps with that).
- If you're using a drive-through automated teller, you'll be there more than 60 seconds so turn off your engine. Likewise, you might turn off the engine when you pull up to a fast-food pickup window.
- Idling for 60 seconds wastes more fuel than stopping and restarting the engine.
- You might think turning your engine off and on results in more wear and tear and higher maintenance costs but in fact for most vehicles 60 seconds is the break-even point where you'll save more money in fuel than you'll spend on extra maintenance.
- Use a block heater on cold winter days to warm the engine before you start it. You can install an automatic timer to turn on the block heater two hours (or the heater's recommended time) before you plan to start the vehicle.
- If you have a remote car starter, please use it wisely to avoid excessively long warmups.

The harmful health impacts of idling

Idling causes emissions with harmful chemicals that can be breathed deep into your lungs. According to a [World Health Organization report on air quality](#) [↗](#), these pollutants have both short- and long-term health impacts, including [premature deaths](#) [↗](#) from stroke, heart disease, lung cancer and acute respiratory infections.

Although everyone can be affected by the air pollution created by idling, children, older adults, and persons with heart and lung conditions are especially vulnerable to poor air quality.

Visit Ottawa Public Health's air quality [webpage](#) [↗](#) for more details about the harmful impacts of air pollution.

How the City of Ottawa is helping to reduce idling

The City is confronting idling on many fronts:

- Training all fleet operators how to avoid idling, and setting the maximum at one minute (rather than three) in a 60-minute period
- Tracking how often vehicles are idling versus moving using telematics (a system to collect data on individual vehicles) now installed on more than 90% of the fleet; with most of the fleet covered we are establishing benchmarks against which we'll measure improvements

- Converting the fleet from gas-powered to hybrid or all electric; to date 200 vehicles have been converted to hybrid and fully electric out of 471 vehicles that have a suitable green alternative to meet City operations
- Training new OC Transpo operators how to minimize fuel consumption and avoid the negative environmental and health impacts of idling
- Sharing this public education campaign with Councillors and partners, to spread the word across the city
- Encouraging alternatives to driving, such as cycling and e-scooters, and regularly improving the city's active transportation network

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