

# Anti-Idling Ordinance

*Discouraging vehicle idling cuts dangerous emissions.*



## The Impact

In Palo Alto, it was predicted that implementing an anti-idling ordinance (AIO) would reduce transportation emissions by 600 to 1200 tons/year, the equivalent of permanently taking 120 to 240 cars off the road annually. Using the same estimates, an anti-idling ordinance implemented throughout San Mateo County would reduce CO<sub>2</sub> by 7,000 to 14,000 tons per year, the equivalent of taking 1,400 to 2,800 cars off the road.

Toxic auto fumes can aggravate asthma and decrease lung function, especially in vulnerable populations including children and elderly adults. Since considerable idling occurs in school zones, an anti-idling ordinance can create a healthier environment for children.

## Where It's Been Implemented

In 2018, the City of Palo Alto passed an anti-idling ordinance that requires drivers to shut off their engines after three minutes if they are not in active traffic. Enforcement focuses on educating the community about the environmental and health impacts associated with idling. The City of Santa Cruz also has an anti-idling ordinance, and Cupertino's climate action plan aims to partner with schools and the Chamber of Commerce to reduce idling.

## Description

Currently, the State of California has idling regulations for commercial heavy-duty diesel vehicles (13 CCR § 2485) and school buses (13 CCR § 2480) that stipulate that these vehicles cannot idle for more than 30 seconds if they are within 100 feet of a school, and they cannot idle for more than

five minutes anywhere else. However, these regulations exclude passenger vehicles such as cars, SUVs, vans and pickup trucks, which make up more than 85 percent of vehicles in California.

A local anti-idling regulation can expand this California regulation to all types of vehicles that are idling without reason. A city can exclude emergency situation conditions such as the need to operate equipment to prevent a safety or health emergency. The Palo Alto ordinance imposes fines on offenders who allow cars to idle more than five minutes, with a written warning for the first violation, a \$100 fine for a second violation and a \$150 fine for all subsequent violations. Successful implementation of this policy is aided by partnering with local schools and community organizations to educate people about the health impacts of idling. In Palo Alto, signs were posted in school pickup zones to discourage idling.

### **Key Drivers**

Idling is an unnecessary and easily avoidable behavior that causes considerable negative health and environmental impacts. The parked idling of all motor vehicles in California is estimated to emit 3 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> annually. Since transportation amounts to 41 percent of California's greenhouse gas emissions, it is a key sector that needs to be addressed with emissions reduction policies.

Idling also is bad for air quality and health. Although most vehicles have advanced considerably over the years to reduce their toxic exhaust, they still emit pollutants that can cause or aggravate asthma, lung cancer, bronchitis, acute respiratory infections and emphysema.

In addition, idling is also economically wasteful, as it consumes unused energy and causes engine wear. It can also create costs related to medical care due to pollution-related illnesses.

### **Key Factors for Success**

Support from parents, teachers, students, schools and community groups will be key to effective implementation of an ordinance aimed at cars idling near schools. Their involvement in education campaigns will help people change their behavior.

### **Key Obstacles**

The infeasibility of enforcement calls into the question its purpose. However, if the focus is to educate, an anti-idling ordinance can still be effective if implemented correctly. As it mainly has the effect of protecting students, such an ordinance should not face major opposition.

### **References and Resources**

- Christine Luong, Palo Alto Sustainability Manager, [christine.luong@cityofpaloalto.org](mailto:christine.luong@cityofpaloalto.org)
- Office of Sustainability, Palo Alto, [sustainability@cityofpaloalto.org](mailto:sustainability@cityofpaloalto.org)
- [Palo Alto Anti-Idling Ordinance Staff Report](#)
- [Idle-free California.org](http://idle-free-california.org)

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