

No Idling Near Schools: Start the School Year Out Right

By Beth Lovejoy, on behalf of the Summit Environmental Commission

The first day of the school year is exciting, in part because it's a fresh beginning--everyone starts with a clean slate. Perhaps you mark it with new clothes, pristine school supplies, and a promise from your student that he really will get his homework in on time this year or that she will never forget her clarinet on band days.

It is also the right time to commit to new habits.

For the sake of personal and planet health, mark the beginning of this school year by committing to two green habits: walk to and from school as much as possible, and avoid idling your car engine near school grounds.

Particularly at the elementary school level, everyone lives within walking distance to school. A ten- or fifteen-minute walk in the morning is an effective way to wake up your sleepy child, and the reverse walk after school provides decompression time after a long day at school. Walking with friends provides an opportunity to socialize before students enter their classrooms, and for you, too, if you walk your little ones to school with other parents.

If there are issues in your school district with sidewalks (or a lack thereof), or a problem crossing busy streets where there are no crossing guards, try driving your children past those points and dropping them off a few blocks from school; you still get the health benefit and the added plus of avoiding school traffic. This is particularly effective at the middle and high school levels where the school day starts earlier (so it is harder to get tweens and teens up and out with time to walk the whole way), and where the drop-off traffic is horrendous. Do the same at pick-up time. Rather than getting to school a half hour before the end of classes so you get a parking place or a primo space in the exhaust-producing wait line, leave later and park several blocks away.

Parking several blocks away also helps address the idling problem around Summit schools. How many days have you seen long lines of cars idling, especially at pick-up time, around every school? Let's count the ways that idling is just plain bad for children's health and your pocketbook:

Idling is unhealthy. Pollution from exhaust can negatively affect a child's lung growth and development. Asthma symptoms in children increase as a result of exposure to car exhaust, and asthma is the most common chronic illness in children and the cause of most school absences.

Idling is "fuelish." Idling gets **ZERO** miles per gallon. Only ten seconds of idling uses more fuel than turning the engine off and on. Idling just ten minutes a day wastes more than 29 gallons of fuel each year.

Idling is Illegal. Idling in New Jersey for more than three minutes is against the law.

And, really, there is no need to idle. If your child cannot walk home, try parking in a legal space a few blocks away from school. Have an arranged pick-up spot; your child will always know where to find you.



All those excuses? Too cold, too hot, it's raining--put on a jacket, open the windows, and put an umbrella in your student's backpack.

The beginning of the school year is almost here. Take a moment to talk to your child about the importance of appreciating and protecting the natural world around us, and parlay that into a commitment that you can both make together--walking as much as possible and idling as little as possible.

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<http://summit.patch.com/articles/avoid-idling-car-engines-near-school-grounds>