

Municipalities going idle-free

by: Jennifer Duggan, Manager, *Climate Change Connection*

Three cities, four towns, four villages and three rural municipalities have created 175 'Idle-Free Zones' throughout Manitoba. How? By installing aluminum traffic signs promoting the message that "Healthy Communities Don't Idle."

Municipalities taking the lead on this issue are from all over the province. Churchill to Cartwright, Virden to Pinawa and areas in between are promoting the reduced-idling message.

One way that we all affect the health of our communities is through our transportation choices. Tailpipe pollution contributes to poor air quality and the release of carcinogenic toxins into our local environment. Not to mention how the emissions contribute to the enhanced greenhouse effect and the rapid changing of our global climate. It's in all of our best interests to ensure that we don't create tailpipe emissions unnecessarily – like when we idle our vehicles.

And boy do we idle! We do it everywhere – parking spots, drop-off zones, drive-thrus, train crossings and even in front of our children's schools. Children are the most vulnerable to harmful emissions since they typically spend more time outdoors, require more air per kilogram of body weight (inhaling a greater proportional volume of polluted air than adults would) and have lungs that are still developing and, therefore, are more sensitive to irritants.

Do you know any children with asthma? They'll thank you for not needlessly idling your car. One of the by-products of tailpipe emissions is ground-level ozone. Ozone irritates and inflames the respiratory tract. Ground-level ozone has been implicated as a bronchoconstrictor, causing airways to

shrink or close, precipitating asthma attacks. Ironically, families with children are among the worst idlers. These drivers regularly release emissions curbside, directly in front of schools, day cares, recreation centres and other child-centred locations.

Humans aren't the only ones at risk from this unsustainable bad habit. Climate change threatens to undermine the natural systems that sustain all biodiversity on the planet. Climatic changes that would normally take thousands of years to occur, allowing plants and animals (including us) time to adapt, may occur in less than 200 years, based on current predictions from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change of the United Nations. Establishing Idle-Free Zones is one of the many ways Manitoba municipalities can be part of the solution to this global threat.

On a more pragmatic note, idling is a waste of fuel and that means it is also a waste of money. For civic fleet vehicles, that means a waste of tax dollars! By lowering the amount of money we all spend on fuel, we increase our spending power for other goods and services to better benefit our local economies.

Create Idle-Free Zones in your area for a healthier, more sustainable Manitoba!

Signs are provided and shipped free-of-charge by Climate Change Connection. Recipients must provide bolt-sets, labour and accept some wear and tear on their wrenches. Signs available on a first-come-first-serve basis. Call Jennifer at (204)-943-4836 or e-mail your order to climateconnection@mts.net. For more information on climate change and greenhouse gas reduction strategies, consult www.climatechangeconnection.org. ●



Idle-Free Zones in Benito, Virden and Brandon.