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## Idling car is harmful, wasteful

It's 15 degrees out this morning. Four inches of snow fell overnight. The car will need to be driven to work soon. Most of us Vermonters will start the car about 10 minutes before leaving. We want time for it to warm up because it's good for the engine, to make scraping the windshield easier, and to make the car nice and warm for us. Some of us will even start our cars from

inside  
our cozy  
homes  
with a  
remote  
vehicle

### Commentary

Wayne F. Michaud

starter.

Unfortunately, there are several things wrong with this practice. This is unnecessary idling, which is both harmful and wasteful. Here is how.

**Respiratory illness:** Vehicle emissions emit a nasty brew of chemicals that impair our lungs and heart. Children, the elderly and asthmatics are especially vulnerable.

**Fuel waste:** Idling your vehicle for 10 minutes uses as much fuel as traveling five miles.

**Engine damage:** Idling is bad for an engine. It does not run at peak efficiency

resulting in incomplete fuel combustion. Fuel residues condense on cylinder walls, contaminate oil and damage engine components. Also, spark plugs foul, and the exhaust system corrodes faster.

**Global warming:** Carbon dioxide emissions cause climate change. On a percapita basis, Vermont is nearly double the national average in vehicle greenhouse gas emissions.

So what do we do, not warm up our cars? Here's the correct cold weather warm-up procedure for gasoline engines. First, protect yourself adequately from the elements with warm clothing. Be prepared with good window scrapers that work. Consider the use of a can of spray de-icer or make your own solution of half water and half vinegar in a spray bottle. Make sure that your vehicle is tuned up. Forget the remote vehicle starter and instead consider using an engine block heater. Now, scrape/de-ice and clear your car off first. Then start it and immediately blast the defroster. In most cases, you'll be ready to go in 30 seconds. Just start out slowly to moderately to get the lubricants flowing. This is the best way to warm up the engine, transmission, bearings. If the weather is more extreme,

or for the elderly, OK, then you need more time to warm up.

And of course, unnecessary idling also applies when we leave our cars running as we go into the grocery store, post office, or bank. Or if we're just sitting in the car and waiting to pick up someone. Don't let the car idle when it's not in traffic. Shut it off.

If there are any doubts that you generally don't need more than 30 seconds for cold weather warm-ups, learn what our neighbors to the north have been doing for years. Canadians are way ahead of us on idle-reduction awareness, with many cities and provinces adopting idling regulations. Do an Internet search on "Idle Free" and the first hit is the Natural Resources Canada Idle-Free Zone. Complete information, including the myths and realities of idling, is there. Then you will be ready to improve our air quality by ending the old harmful and wasteful habit of unnecessary idling.

*Wayne F. Michaud of Bristol is coordinator of Idle-Free VT, a grass-roots campaign to raise an awareness of the problem of unnecessary vehicle idling and to get a Vermont state law on idle-reduction enacted. His Web site is [idlefreevt.org](http://idlefreevt.org).*