

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

# DIESEL EXHAUST AND SCHOOL BUS IDLING

Children breathe 50 percent more air per pound of body weight than adults.

Diesel exhaust ranks among the air pollutants that EPA believes pose the greatest public health risks.

More than 24 million children in the United States ride a bus to and from school every day.

**D**iesel exhaust from idling school buses can accumulate on and around the bus and pose a health risk, particularly to children. When buses idle in the school yard, the exhaust also can pollute the air inside the school building and pose a health risk to children throughout the day. Exposure to diesel exhaust can cause lung damage and respiratory problems. Diesel exhaust also exacerbates asthma and existing allergies, and long-term exposure is thought to increase the risk of lung cancer. However, there are some simple steps that schools can take to reduce idling time and air pollution.



### HOW ARE CHILDREN AFFECTED?

Air pollution from diesel vehicles has health implications for everyone, but children may be more susceptible to this pollution because they breathe 50 percent more air per pound of body weight than do adults. Diesel exhaust contains small particles, known as fine particulate matter, as well as smog-forming and toxic air pollutants. Exposure to these pollutants is associated with increased frequency of childhood illnesses. More than 24 million children in the United States ride a bus to and from school every day.

### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO REDUCE DIESEL POLLUTION

Although every school district is unique, there are a number of steps that schools can take to reduce the health risks associated with exposure to diesel exhaust. Here are some actions school districts should consider:

#### ESTABLISH IDLING GUIDELINES

- When school bus drivers arrive at loading or unloading areas to drop off or pick up passengers, they should turn off their buses as soon as possible to eliminate idling time and reduce harmful emissions. The school bus should not be restarted until it is ready to depart.
- If buses need the engine to run the flashing lights, consider changing the circuit configurations so that the flashing lights can be powered by the battery without the engine running.

### STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO REDUCE DIESEL POLLUTION

- 1 Direct school bus drivers to turn off their buses as soon as they arrive in the school yard.
- 2 Limit idling time of buses during early morning warm-up.
- 3 Provide a space inside the school where bus drivers can wait.



For more information:  
Visit [www.epa.gov/otaq/retrofit](http://www.epa.gov/otaq/retrofit)  
~or~  
[www.epa.gov/cleanschoolbus](http://www.epa.gov/cleanschoolbus)  
or call 734-214-4780

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- At school bus depots, limit the idling time during early morning warm-up to what is recommended by the manufacturer (generally 3 to 5 minutes). In colder climates, block heaters can help warm the engine of older vehicles to avoid starting difficulties and shorten warm-up time. New vehicles are designed to start easily at all temperatures without idling.
- In the winter, provide a space inside the school where bus drivers who arrive early can wait.
- Follow the anti-idling laws and guidelines that many states have in place.

#### **WORK CLOSELY WITH BUS COMPANIES AND BUS DRIVERS TO IMPLEMENT THE GUIDELINES**

- Make sure both the bus company and the bus drivers understand the importance of the new guidelines.
- Highlight the economic benefit of reduced fuel consumption as a result of less idling. A typical school bus burns approximately one-half gallon of diesel fuel for each hour it idles. Thus, if a company operates 50 buses and each bus reduces its idling time by 30 minutes per day, at \$1 per gallon of diesel fuel, the company would save \$2,250 per school year in fuel costs.
- Inform drivers of the potential risk to their health from breathing diesel exhaust and the benefits of not idling.
- Establish a program to recognize drivers for their efforts to reduce idling. For example, create buttons that drivers who pledge to follow the guidelines can wear.

#### **WORK CLOSELY WITH BUS COMPANIES TO RETROFIT BUSES WITH POLLUTION CONTROLS**

- Fuel buses with ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel and install particulate matter filters. This approach can reduce emissions of particulate matter by more than 90 percent.
- Consider retrofitting with catalyst technology if the filter/fuel option is not feasible.
- More information about retrofit options is available at [www.epa.gov/otaq/retrofit](http://www.epa.gov/otaq/retrofit).

#### **WORK CLOSELY WITH BUS COMPANIES TO PURCHASE THE CLEANEST NEW BUSES**

- EPA is working to reduce diesel pollution from new heavy-duty diesel trucks and buses by setting more stringent emission standards that will take effect beginning in 2004. In 2007, new trucks and buses rolling off the assembly lines will be 95 percent cleaner than today's models.
- Because some buses may meet EPA standards ahead of schedule, ask the manufacturer before purchasing a new bus to see if you can acquire one that meets these standards. In addition, many new buses come equipped with devices that minimize idling and warm-up time.

#### **BECOME A CLEAN SCHOOL BUS USA PARTNER**

- Clean School Bus USA is a voluntary program that seeks to reduce children's exposure to diesel exhaust. More information is available at [www.epa.gov/cleanschoolbus](http://www.epa.gov/cleanschoolbus).

Idling wastes fuel and money.

A typical school bus burns approximately one-half gallon of diesel fuel for each hour it idles.

The less school buses idle, the more money school districts can save.