

WUHS/MS conducts an idle-free school campaign

By **Kat Robbins and Wayne Michaud**

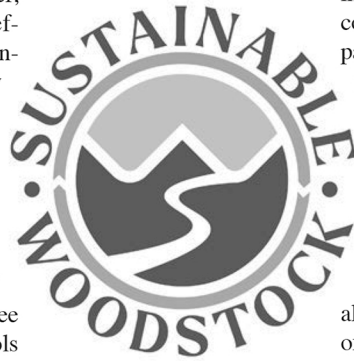
For Sustainable Woodstock

Idling your vehicle contributes to air pollution and emits pollutants known or suspected to cause respiratory illnesses, cancer, and other serious health effects over time. Additionally, idling wastes energy and contributes to climate change.

To address these concerns, the Earth Beat Club of Woodstock Union High School and Middle School (WUHS/MS) conducted an idle-free campaign called Schools Are Not Drive-Thrus. Prolonged vehicle idling typically occurs at schools, especially during the dismissal period. This largely unnecessary idling by a caravan of vehicles results in tailpipe toxins that negatively impacts local air quality, CO2 emissions that impacts our planet, and fuel waste that impacts our wallets.

Kat Robbins, the school's place-based education coordinator, was the campaign

advisor and partnered with Wayne Michaud, executive director of Green Driving America Inc. (GDA), a California-based nonprofit that advocates for and educates on clean transportation and



transportation efficiency. GDA, which was originally founded in Vermont as Idle-Free VT, organized this campaign, thanks to funding by an Upper Valley foundation that wishes to remain anonymous.

The campaign began Oct. 12, 2023 with an initial training session given virtually by Michaud, showing Earth Beat Club members the impacts of idling and the

steps to the campaign. Following this was three days in the week of Oct. 16 of Earth Beat members unobtrusively collecting data of vehicles idling during dismissal. Then the school issued information to the school community on the campaign, along with the impacts of idling, in the Principal's Corner Newsletter on Nov. 5, 2023.

The newsletter issued the following recommendations for drivers:

- When waiting for students to be picked up, all engines should be shut off.
- All drivers should turn off engines when they arrive at school and when they expect to be parked for more than 30 seconds.
- When in a line of vehicles back from the school entrance at dismissal, we encourage drivers to stay in their positions with engines shut off and have the student come to them. If drivers must slowly move toward the school entrance, please turn off engines and restart.



Max van der Schoot and Mia Zillian conduct data collection on vehicle idling practices at WUHS/MS.

Kat Robbins Photo

Note that restarting an engine uses only 10 seconds worth of fuel. Also note that, according to the U.S. Department of Energy, starters are overbuilt and can be started up to 10 times a day with no additional wear.

• If idling is necessary for temperature control, or to maintain 75 degrees for frail elderly, infant or pet passen-

gers in the vehicle, please restrict it to no more than a few minutes.

On Dec. 4, 2023, Earth Beat members led the final step of the campaign: a driver contact event. During the dismissal period, students, with flyers and "be idle-free" window cling decals provided by GDA, talked with drivers about the benefits of avoiding prolonged

idling (except in extreme weather conditions).

The school's Buildings and Grounds plans to install two GDA-provided aluminum Idle Free Zone signs in strategic locations of the pick-up areas.

Campaign details on the GDA webpage dedicated to this campaign include data collection figures, notification of the campaign in the Principal's Corner Newsletter, and the driver contact event.

The school administration of WUHS/MS has been provided information on how this effort can be sustained in future years, including consideration for adopting a policy or practice to restrict passenger vehicle idling on school grounds. Idling of all motor vehicles is restricted by law in the State of Vermont, with exceptions.

Did you know?

Just ten seconds of idling wastes more fuel than shutting off and restarting the engine.