

# Why It's Important to Endorse the Healthy Air Oregon Project

## The goal of Healthy Air Oregon

This project raises public awareness about both the dangers of benzene exposure and greenhouse gases, and the simple steps everyone can take to make a positive impact for clean air. One step is reducing car and truck idling.

## Benzene in Oregon's air

Benzene is a toxic air pollutant that can cause serious health effects including cancer. Oregon currently has some of the highest reported levels of benzene in the United States. Gasoline is the major source of that benzene. Benzene gets into our air through tailpipe exhaust.

## Health effects of benzene

Current medical research demonstrates a clear association between various detrimental health effects and repeated exposure to benzene in occupational settings. Laboratory animal studies have confirmed the harmful effects of repeated exposure to high levels of benzene. Health effects include cancer (primarily leukemia) and damage to the nervous system, immune system and blood cell production.

Cancer is a disease caused by a complex combination of factors that are difficult to link back to a specific environmental pollutant. The Oregon Public Health Division and DEQ are concerned about any additional cancer burden. The last set of estimates in 2002 indicated that benzene was more than 20 times over the acceptable cancer risk of one in a million, about twice the national cancer risk for this pollutant.

## Limiting our exposure to benzene

The State of Oregon has several programs to reduce benzene. For example, Oregon law now prohibits attendants from topping off vehicle fuel tanks during refueling. Topping off causes gasoline drips and spills that increase public exposure to harmful pollution, wastes fuel, and causes vapor recovery equipment in vehicles and at gas pumps to malfunction.

## What you can do to reduce benzene

There are many things people can do on their own to reduce benzene and other air toxics in the environment:

- Avoid unnecessary idling – turn off your motor when stopping for more than 30 seconds (not in traffic)
- Keep vehicles properly maintained
- Drive less

## Did you know...?

- More than 50% of air pollution in Oregon from the cars and trucks.
- Unnecessary idling emits 93 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> each year.
- We waste 10.6 billion gallons of gasoline from idling in one year.
- One car, idling just 10 minutes puts, 1 pound of CO<sub>2</sub> and 65 grams of air toxics into our air.
- One car, idling just 10 minutes, puts 26 grams of particulate matter into our air.
- The average person idles 16 minutes every day.



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Please support the Healthy Air Oregon Campaign!  
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## Reduce Idling to Prevent Air Pollution

### DEQ encourages efforts to reduce idling because vehicle exhaust is a major source of air pollution in Oregon

About 40 to 50 percent of air toxics in Oregon come from vehicle exhaust. Air toxics are pollutants known or suspected to cause cancer and other serious health problems.

#### Vehicle exhaust contains:

- Benzene which is known to cause cancer.
- Chemicals that produce smog; smog worsens asthma and other breathing problems.
- Fine particle pollution which worsens breathing and heart problems.

#### Children are particularly sensitive to vehicle exhaust

Multiple studies link vehicle exhaust to increased rates of cancer, heart and lung disease and asthma. Children are especially sensitive because their lungs are still developing and they breathe more air per pound of body weight than adults.

#### Facts about idling:

- Twenty seconds of idling uses more fuel than restarting the engine.
- Restarting a car more frequently has little impact on the battery and starter motor.
- Excessive idling is hard on your engine, contaminates engine oil and makes spark plus dirty.
- Exhaust levels are higher in an idling car than at roadside.

#### Anti-idling efforts support DEQ's strategic directions which include:

- Promoting sustainable practices.
- Improving Oregon's air.
- Protecting people and the environment from toxics.
- Involving Oregonians in solving problems.



Windshield reminder decal available from DEQ

#### What you can do to reduce idling:

- Turn off the engine if you anticipate being stopped 20 seconds or more.
- Put a "Turn Off Your Car" reminder decal on your windshield.
- Reduce warm-up idling. Modern engines need no more than 30 seconds of warm-up idling even on the coldest days.
- Spread the word to family, friends, neighbors and schools.
- Start an anti-idling program at your workplace, school or place of worship.

To order windshield reminder decals or for more information contact Susan Drake at 503-229-6918 or by e-mail at [drake.susan@deq.state.or.us](mailto:drake.susan@deq.state.or.us).

*Alternative formats (Braille, large type) of this document can be made available. Contact the DEQ Office of Communications & Outreach, Portland, at (503) 229-5696, or toll-free in Oregon at 1-800-452-4011.*



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