

A SORTED AFFAIR

Healthier skies and money in your pocket

by Jane Bogner

Sunday, Feb 10, 2008

A quick question: what are your miles per gallon (mpg) when you sit idling in the drive-through line at your favorite fast food restaurant?

According to Susan White from the Solano Asthma Coalition, "vehicle idling happens without much thought, yet it is harmful to our air quality, our health, our cars and our wallets. An idling vehicle gets zero mpg and wastes gas and money while polluting the air. It wastes more fuel than turning it off then later restarting your vehicle's engine.

"Although most parents idle their cars while waiting for children after school, it is unnecessary and less efficient for your car. A single idling vehicle dropping off and picking up children at school puts three pounds of pollution into the air per month.

"Vehicle exhaust is one of the leading sources of outdoor air pollution in Solano County. Exposure to vehicle exhaust increases the risk of death from heart and lung disease as well as lung cancer.

"The Solano Asthma Coalition is concerned because asthma symptoms also increase as a result of vehicle exhaust. Asthma is the most common chronic illness in children, the cause of most school absences, and the third leading cause of hospitalization among children under the age of 15. Solano County has the highest rate of asthma in California.

"The average adult takes 20,000 breaths each day, which is equivalent to breathing 3,400 gallons of air. Children breathe 50 percent more air per pound than adults because they breathe more quickly and take in more air. Children typically spend more time outdoors than adults, which increases their exposure to vehicle emissions and to the health risks they pose.

When I first started volunteering at VALCORE Recycling twenty years ago, a friend would bring her children and we would sit by the Sierra Club bin sorting paper. We would also unload cars that parked by the bins. I quickly became aware that the exhaust that we were breathing was not a good thing and made it a policy for all cars to shut off their engines while recycling.

I urge all of you to help Solano Asthma Coalition meet its goals: turn your engine off if parked for more than 10 seconds and reduce warm-up idling to 30 seconds.

By the way, Consumers Union has advocated this practice for years.

On the business side, when new big box stores, shopping centers, housing developments, and local businesses (that expand to regional businesses) are proposed, Environmental Impact Reports (EIR) are prepared. There is always a pollution component to these EIRs and we need to make sure that the proposed dollars that these businesses bring in don't do so to the detriment of our health.

More businesses mean more traffic and more pollution. If we want to retain our rural open spaces and not turn into another Los Angeles, we need to speak up and demand that our elected officials protect these valuable green spaces for the health of our county.

ECO TIPS

It's Sunday night and do you know where your reusable coffee mug is? Just a reminder for those of you who need their fancy coffee fix to put your mug by your cell phone and take it to work tomorrow.

For valentines day, shop locally and ask for locally made or organic products.

VALCORE Recycling Board Secretary Jane Bogner's "A Sorted Affair" is published every other week in the Times-Herald. For recycling information call VALCORE Recycling at 645-8258 or visit www.VALCORErecycling.org.

E N D