

More Texas cities gear up to slow truck idling

09:30 AM CST on Sunday, February 22, 2009

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Truckers craving the comforts of home within their rigs are finding fewer places to park in North Texas.



BEN TORRES/Special Contributor
Greg Stewart, 50, connects an IdleAire module to his truck's passenger-side window after pulling into a special parking lot at the Travel Centers of America truck stop off Interstate 20 in Dallas. Stewart, a trucker for 12 years, saves 3 to 5 gallons of fuel over eight to 10 hours when he uses IdleAire. He also likes the system for its entertainment benefits, including cable TV and HBO.

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Over the past five months, a dozen cities and counties have adopted laws prohibiting idling by heavy vehicles during the state's ozone season, which runs April 1 to Oct. 31. Officials say dozens more municipalities plan to follow suit.

Advocates call the measure necessary to combat pollution health risks and improve air quality.

Idling "is a very big contributor to ozone," said Amanda Brimmer, a senior transportation planner with the North Central Texas Council of Governments.

But some truckers characterize the anti-idling campaign, which is gaining steam across the country, as an attack on their lifestyle and livelihood.

"People just see a big dirty truck, and they fail to see the human side of it," said Kevin Watts, a former trucker who runs [The Trucker's Report](#), an online news site and forum.

Nine counties in North Texas fail federal air quality standards, and vehicles are the region's biggest polluters.

Reducing voluntary idling – occupied, stationary vehicles running when not in traffic – is one of several initiatives designed to cut ozone levels. State law already prohibits leaving a vehicle of any type running while unoccupied.

Dallas was the first area city to adopt the idling regulation, drafted by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. The law applies to vehicles over 14,000 pounds, which includes delivery trucks, buses, tow trucks and tractor-trailer rigs. Passenger cars are not affected.

But the Regional Transportation Council is lobbying state legislators to broaden the law to include vehicles over 6,000 pounds, which would include smaller trucks, and make it enforceable year-round, Brimmer said.

"I think the next step is passenger cars," she said.

Grass-roots campaigns encouraging drivers to turn off their engines instead of idling have cropped up across the country. Many people resist because of the false beliefs that idling reduces engine wear and consumes less gas than restarting the vehicle, said TCEQ spokesman Terry Clawson.

"With modern cars, that's just not an issue anymore," he said. "If you're going to be idling for more than a minute or so, you should turn your car off."

New elementary schools in Frisco are designed to shorten car-pool lines, a common idling spot. And Arlington is studying whether curtailing future fast-food drive-throughs would reduce idling emissions.

"We used to say we were leaving no stone unturned for solutions; now we're looking under every pebble," Brimmer said.

The law for vehicles over 14,000 pounds prohibits idling more than five minutes unless stuck in traffic, defrosting a windshield, or performing military, emergency or law enforcement functions. The law allows buses, including those from school fleets, to idle for 30 minutes to provide heat or air conditioning for passengers.

Trucks with sleeper berths are exempt if the driver is taking a federally mandated rest break, but they may not park near schools, homes or hospitals.

When idling laws first surfaced several years ago, many trucking companies and their advocacy groups opposed them. They have since accepted them as inevitable and, in some cases, embraced them, said Clayton Boyce, spokesman for American Trucking Associations.

Boyce's group launched a campaign last year to promote environmentally friendly changes in the industry. He acknowledges that results have been mixed but says many companies have embraced the cause.

Some have equipped their trucks with alternative power units that allow drivers to run their heating or air conditioning and other electronic devices without the engine. The units produce low or no emissions and save on fuel costs.

More than 100 truck stops across the country offer IdleAire, which pumps heated or cooled air into truck cabs and provides electricity.




But Watts, the former trucker, said those alternatives don't solve every problem. Drivers spend lots of time waiting to load and unload with nowhere to go but their cabs.

"I want to save the environment, too, but we have to be real," he said. "In Texas, it's likely to be 100 outside and 130 in the truck."

PUTTING BRAKES ON IDLING

North Texas cities and counties with idling restrictions include Arlington, Benbrook, Colleyville, Dallas, Euless, Kaufman County, Keene, Lake Worth, Little Elm, Mabank, Pecan Hill, Tarrant County, University Park and Westlake.

SOURCE: North Central Texas Council of Governments

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