

Top 10 Car Idling Myth Busters



We've all heard lots of stories about car idling. Here we set the record straight and bust those persistent urban myths with fact-based data. Here we go:

#1 Myth: *There's nothing I can do about car idling.*

Fact: Actually, you can. One of the easiest ways to eliminate unnecessary idling is to turn off your car.

#2 Myth: *The best way to warm up my car is by letting it idle for several minutes.*

Fact: Not so. Idling is not an efficient way to warm up your car, not even in cold weather. The best way to warm an engine is to drive it, accelerating gently for the first mile. A slow drive-off is the best way to warm up your car's transmission, tires, suspension, steering and wheel bearings.

#3 Myth: *Eliminating unnecessary idling won't save me money.*

Fact: No go. One hour of idling can burn up to one gallon of fuel. Avoiding 5 minutes of idling each day can save \$35 every year. When you idle, you get 0 miles per gallon. Talk about money going up in smoke!

#4 Myth: *Traffic signal timing is not optimized to minimize vehicle idling.*

Fact: The City of Fort Collins re-timed all major arterial traffic signals in 2009, saving over 1 million gallons of fuel and almost \$18 million in communitywide time and fuel costs each year.

#5 Myth: *Idling is not much of a problem in Fort Collins.*

Fact: Local surveys suggest that there are in excess of 15,000 hours of unnecessary idling in Fort Collins every year, from warming up vehicles on cold mornings and dropping off or picking up kids from school.

#6 Myth: *Frequent re-starting of car engines damages my car.*

Fact: There's little impact on engine components like the battery and starter with frequent re-starts. You can actually reduce engine wear and tear when you turn off your car rather than idling. Excessive idling can damage your engine components, including cylinders, spark plugs and the exhaust system.

#7 **Myth:** *Shutting off and restarting your vehicle uses more gas than if you leave it running.*

Fact: The bottom line is that just 30 seconds of idling uses more fuel than restarting the engine. As a rule of thumb, if you are going to stop for 30 seconds or more - except in traffic - turn off the engine. Some experts estimate even 10 seconds is the break even point.

#8 **Myth:** *Pollution emitted from idling cars is insignificant to my health and the environment.*

Fact: It's actually quite significant. The toxics emitted from idling can impair our lungs and heart, and idling fumes have been linked to asthma, decreased lung function, cardiac disease, cancer and other serious health problems. Prolonged exposure can even lead to death. Kids, the elderly and folks with respiratory ailments are especially at risk.

Idling just one gas car for 5 minutes a day can emit as many as 25 pounds of harmful air pollutants and 260 pounds of carbon dioxide a year, the major greenhouse gas.

#9 **Myth:** *Sitting in an idling car prevents exposure to car exhaust fumes.*

Fact: Not so. According to the International Center for Technology Assessment (CTA), exposure to most car pollutants, such as volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and carbon monoxide (CO) is actually much higher inside cars than road side. The highest exposure occurs when sitting in traffic congestion or highways or in a line-up of idling vehicles at a school or drive-through. In fact, CO levels can be 7 times the outside air level!

#10 **Myth:** *It's illegal to turn off the engine while in traffic in Fort Collins.*

Fact: As long as you are in the car, it's not illegal to turn off the engine.

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