

Anti-idling window could be narrowed in further environmental action

If you leave your car running for more than two minutes without going anywhere, you could get a tap on your window as the Aurora looks crack down further on vehicle idling.

This month, Council will consider revisions to the Town's current Anti-Idling Policy.

A key change will be revising the current limit, which currently stands at five minutes, to just two, while continuing on with an education campaign approved by Council last year.

'The 'Every Second Counts' public education campaign was kicked off in the Fall of 2021 and raises awareness about vehicle idling,' said Natalie Kehle, Energy and Climate Change Analyst for the Town of Aurora. 'The campaign supports critical changes in idling behaviour as residents and businesses get back to their regular schedules (post-lockdowns). The 2021 campaign consisted of temporary mobile signs strategically placed on high traffic roads and in school zones advertising the new idling restrictions and providing education on the importance of idling reduction; bylaw education, including handing out slips when dealing with idle vehicles in school zones and investigating idling complaints received by the Town.'

A webpage was also dedicated to anti-idling with educational material, reporting mechanisms, and even a quiz. Idling challenges were included in the Town's Go Green Challenge, which took place last fall, while the Town developed anti-idling resources for local schools and businesses, including free anti-idling posters, toolkits for schools to use in their curriculum, and more.

Anti-idling currently falls under the Noise Bylaw but recent changes to the legislation had created a challenge.

An anti-idling policy can no longer fall to the Noise Bylaw for enforcement and Kehle says a more 'effective' mechanism would be a standalone bylaw that speaks specifically to greenhouse gas emissions 'and other exhaust products' from idling rather than based on noise generation.

Until that time, proposed changes to the plan include renewed education, with campaigns targeted at GO Station users, drivers in school zones, and those outside recreation centres, bus stations, and in carpool parking lots 'and a reduction in idling time.

'The policy is revised to limit idling to two minutes rather than five minutes,' says Kehle. 'This better aligns with neighbouring municipalities. The original five-minute limit was to support enforcement activities as it aligned with the Noise Bylaw. Without having the restriction of the Noise Bylaw, the Policy is updated to reflect best practices in anti-idling provisions found in the GTA.'

Bringing the limit down to two minutes was music to the ears of Councillor Rachel Gilliland when the changes were recently presented to the Town's Environmental Advisory Committee for their feedback.

'I'm glad it went from five to two,' said Councillor Gilliland. 'I was pushing that at Council, so I am glad to see it has come to fruition.'

Committee members largely supported the changes but said policies on idling need to have more teeth than simply education.

'I wish it was one minute, but two minutes is 250 per cent better than five minutes,' said Committee member Colin Brown. 'I just find people idle thoughtlessly.'

Brown challenged the Town to take things a step further by challenging what he described as 'institutionalized pollution.'

'If the Town can ever take on institutionalized idling, I am thinking of all the drive-thrus, drive-thru banks, drive-thru to pick up their coffee, I can understand if someone has a physical disability needing to drive through to do so, but I don't understand it any

other time. You will see 15 ? 20 cars lined up and when people are sitting in their cars it's institutionalized pollution.?

That, said Councillor Gilliland, might be a tall order for the municipality to enforce.

?I feel it is something that would be tough for bylaw to enforce when someone is at a private business while they are picking up [something at] a drive-thru,? she said. ?I don't know how you would enforce that, but I think most vehicles that are on the market today have that auto-idle that turns your car off when your foot is on the brake.?

Some municipalities, however, are looking at this issue, said Kehle.

?There is a challenge when you just think about it ? when you're in a drive-thru, you're actually driving every couple of minutes. You're not idling for 20 minutes, but you're slowly moving. It would be hard for Bylaw to go there and observe and justify that kind of ticket. I know some municipalities are actually not allowing drive-thrus anymore. They are just restricting drive-thrus in general, but that is more on the development side of things than the Bylaw side of things. It's a concern and very hard to enforce.?

?That is probably the solution,? concurred Brown. ?It is a better idea for the Town to take this on and say, ?We're not going to allow this anymore.?'

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter