City of Seattle – Truck Idling Specification (2008)

Environmental Specifications

Delivery of Products and Services – Idling Prohibited: Vehicles and/or diesel fuel trucks shall not idle at the time and location of the delivery to the City for more than five minutes. The City requires vendors to utilize practices that reduce fuel consumption and emission discharge, including turning off trucks and vehicles during delivery of products to the City. Exceptions to this requirement include when a vehicle is making deliveries and associated power is necessary; when the engine is used to provide power in another device, and if required for proper warm-up and cool-down of the engine. Specific examples include “bucket” trucks that allow a worker to reach wires on telephone poles or tree branches for trimming; and vehicles with a lift on the back of a truck to move products in and out of the truck. The City of Seattle has a commitment to reduction of unnecessary fuel emissions. The City intends to improve air quality by reducing unnecessary air pollution from idling vehicles. Limiting car and truck idling supports cleaner air, healthier work environments, the efficient use of city resources, the public’s enjoyment of City properties and programs, conservation of natural resources, and good stewardship practices. A reference sheet regarding the Anti-Idling provision is attached to provide further background.

City of Seattle Anti Idling Provision (Contents of Attachment)

Anti-Idling Provision

Why does the City of Seattle have an anti-idling provision?
The goal of the City of Seattle Anti-Idling contract provision is to improve air quality by reducing unnecessary air pollution from idling vehicles. Limiting car and truck idling supports cleaner air, healthier work environments, the efficient use of city resources, the public’s enjoyment of City properties and programs, conservation of natural resources, and good stewardship practices.

What does the contract provision require?
The contract provision limits unnecessary engine idling to five minutes. No operator shall unnecessarily idle the engine of a diesel fueled car or truck that is stopped for a foreseeable period of time in excess of five minutes.

What is engine idling?
Vehicle idling is the running of a car or truck engine while the car or truck is stopped for a foreseeable period of time and not in a PTO (or similar) mode.
Is all engine idling prohibited?

No. While the contract provision prohibits unnecessary idling for more than five minutes, it also recognizes that there are times when idling is simply unavoidable. There are three specific reasons that we recognize for idling, although other situations may also be appropriate: when an engine is being repaired and operating the engine is necessary for the repair; when a vehicle is making deliveries and associated power is necessary; when the engine is used to provide power to another device, to the extent necessary to de-ice windows for proper visibility.

The most common reason a company may need to idle is to allow continued operation of additional devices, or auxiliary power units. Refrigerator units on trucks with perishable goods or vehicles operating special equipment, such as a lift on the back of a truck to move goods in and out of the truck or wheelchair lifts in buses or vans that may require engine power to operate are common examples of equipment that are operated with the engine power. Other examples might include “bucket” trucks that allow a worker to reach wires on telephone poles or tree branches for trimming.

Are there other times when it’s OK to idle not listed in the provision?

There are other times when idling is permitted as long as the idling is absolutely necessary.

For example, running the engine to operate the windshield defroster to clear a windshield of ice on an extremely cold day is a good example of necessary idling. It’s a safety problem if you cannot see where you’re going and if the windshield is not warm enough to melt snow and freezing rain while driving. Running the engine while actively clearing snow and ice off the vehicle and to warm the windshield and interior of the vehicle is necessary idling.

Common sense also tells us that heaters and air conditioning units almost always bring the vehicle’s interior into a comfortable range in a short time. We also know that heaters and air conditioning units work faster when the vehicle is being driven, not when it is left idling. So most vehicles, most of the time, will reach a comfortable temperature within the first five minutes of driving. Some heavy vehicles, such as buses or trucks, may need some additional time to bring interior temperatures into a comfortable range.

What are a few examples of unnecessary idling?

• Sitting in your car in a parking lot with the engine on during mild or cool weather is unnecessary. The interior of your car will stay warm for 5 to 10 minutes on all but the coldest days.
• Leaving the vehicle running while unattended to let the heater warm it or the air conditioner cool it for extended periods of time is unnecessary idling (it is also in violation of traffic law). Five minutes should be the maximum amount of time unless weather conditions are extreme, and the engine should not be left running while the vehicle is unattended for any length of time.
• Operating devices not related to transporting passengers or goods. Letting the engine run for an hour or more to play a movie or to charge a cell phone causes
unnecessary pollution, is a nuisance for others nearby and puts excessive wear and tear on the engine.

**Am I causing more pollution by stopping and starting the engine?**
No. Once the engine has warmed up, an idling engine causes more pollution by running than by stopping and starting up again. Studies indicate that the trade-off for light- and medium-duty gasoline powered vehicles is about 10 seconds (i.e. the vehicle will produce more pollution idling longer than 10 seconds than it will by shutting down and restarting the engine). The time trade-off on medium- and heavy-duty diesel engines is about 30 seconds.

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