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Local students push council for resolution to reduce auto idling



Students at prior protest push for idling car reduction Photo provided

to support and increase the use of solar and wind power and inspire more homeowners to enroll in the alternative energy organization's electrical supply programs and increasing the number of bike and walk lanes in the city to reduce auto emissions and to maintain biker and pedestrian safety. The Project Earth leaders said the results of simple action they support would improve overall air quality and "make our air cleaner to breathe."

Asking "Why is idling bad?" with an image on the PowerPoint screen, David reiterated that auto emissions pollute the environment, have harmful health impacts, and cost extra money. Greenhouse gases released when one gallon of gas is burned can reach 20 pounds of toxins that contribute to global warming, according to Project Earth's research. Parents and guardians of students who sit in their cars with engines idling, he said, causes obvious waste. By simply turning off the ignition, beginning to solve a problem that often seems insurmountable - the climate crisis - becomes possible. If everyone on the planet takes this one easy no-idling action, the degree of change increases exponentially.

The average driver, according to data gathered by Project Earth, emits 4.6 metric tons of carbon dioxide in one year. Particles released are many but also minuscule, meaning they harm not only a person's lungs, but pass into the bloodstream. Conditions such as asthma, bronchitis and cancer can be exacerbated or introduced as a result of dangerous auto emissions. With gas prices hitting all-time highs, the team leaders said the expenditure wasted during idling is an obvious reason to stop the practice. Lauren said their idling experiment conducted in 2018 in the Burton Valley parking lot showed some cars idling for 10 to 20 minutes. A subsequent experiment had them holding up handmade, no-idling signs. They observed that 10% of the drivers turned off their car engines. They were inspired by having created even minor change in what is a patterned behavior and set out to expand their efforts.

A no-idling poster contest begun in 2019 invited students at all schools in the Lafayette School District to create entries. Selecting the best, Brekke said the award-winning posters are displayed at Lafayette school parking lots.

Raini described presenting a proposal for a no-idling ordinance to the Lafayette Environmental Task Force. The task force advised the Project Earth leaders that their priorities were inarguably important, but resources to enact an actual ordinance were not available. After talking to other cities in the region, a simpler solution was agreed upon: a resolution that requires no official or costly enforcement but comes with the energy of a statement by the city that it supports and is committed to playing whatever role is possible in making change. Education and encouragement not to idle coming from not only students, but from adults and city officials, she said will hopefully help reduce emissions. Lafayette with a resolution would become part of a national movement for cities to support protecting the environment.

In other action, a Project Earth petition was presented at various events and schools and in neighborhoods asking people so say they care about protecting the environment. The team received approximately 250 signatures and, drawing on enthusiasm from local residents, adapted a resolution adopted by the city of Dublin, making alterations to suit Lafayette.

Council Member Susan Candell asked if cars, trucks, buses and other vehicles are included. Raini said she thought there are laws about school buses but they would investigate the matter The council members thanked the team for persisting and expanding their goals.

Three team leaders from Project Earth: Idle-Free Lafayette - Raini Chugh (president); David Siu (secretary); and Lauren Brekke (treasurer) - appeared before the city council Sept. 12 to request a resolution to implement no-idling initiatives in Lafayette in an effort to reduce emissions that contribute to climate change. The joint presentation described a four-year effort headed by the three Stanley Middle School seventh-graders to reduce auto idling at schools and encourage similar behavioral change at other locations in the city.

Raini said the team started the project in third grade at Burton Valley Elementary School. At that time, they identified three primary factors making climate change worse that could be altered with more awareness about their negative impacts.

In addition to no-idling initiatives, Project Earth goals include advocating for and educating people about MCE

City Manager Niroop Srivatsa brought forth draft Resolution 2022-61 declaring Lafayette an idle-free city for possible approval at the Oct. 11 council meeting, after press time.

The resolution includes exceptions for no idling on days when temperatures are over 85 degrees Fahrenheit or below 35 degrees Fahrenheit. It also commits to not idling municipal vehicles with the exception of cars used by patrol officers while on duty.

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