



PARKING AND IDLING: NOT AN EASY NUT TO CRACK

By Richard B. Easley, CAPP

When most people think of parking, they think of empty vehicles with their engines turned off. Let's look specifically at diesel engine idling, which primarily involves commercial buses and trucks. This happens so often that environmentally-savvy communities are trying to eliminate or minimize this practice. Diesel idling releases various pollutants that have been linked to serious illnesses including cancer, heart disease, chronic bronchitis, and asthma. To compound the problem, idling is very expensive.

Parking Laws

Quite a few jurisdictions have enacted laws that are much more than a slap on the wrist. In fact, it's not uncommon to find jurisdictions that impose \$1,000 fines for the first offense of idling for more than three minutes. Still others start with a high initial fine and double that fine for every subsequent idling violation. Of course, there are still other jurisdictions that do nothing at all and allow vehicles to idle as long as their drivers like.

Challenges

Often, the difference between effectively reducing diesel idling and merely raising revenues and angering the bus and truck industry is communication. A good consultant who understands the language and issues of the bus and truck industry and the needs of the affected jurisdictions is key. It is very easy to put up a sign stating that idling is not permitted. What is not understood is that with that action comes a significant level of awareness and responsibility. It makes a world of difference to know that all participants at the table understand important considerations, including:

- The latest developments in diesel emission reduction technologies.
- The challenging business constraints that have to be navigated in the bus and truck industry.
- The community and political outcry for healthier air.

Hiring the right consultant can help uncover industry challenges that have no easy answers. As we all know, the best way to address challenges is to first define what they are. Here's a common scenario that may not be so obvious: The Motorcoach Challenge.

If you look around at museums, special events, monuments, theaters, etc., you will likely see one or more buses idling. It might seem very simple to pass

a law that makes it illegal for a bus to sit there and idle. However, when you drive a big metal can and it's 95 degrees outside and you're sitting in the sun, you know just how hot that bus can become after several hours. One study conducted on school buses with windows down found the temperature inside was 116 degrees. A motorcoach would surely have exceeded that temperature. The charter bus industry is extremely competitive and must provide the best customer service possible. Being told by law that they must subject their customers to extreme temperatures puts them in a precarious position.

One might say that this is unfortunate but not my problem; the law is the law. Things get a bit fuzzy when you recognize the economic effect that motorcoaches and tourists have on the local economy. Unfortunately, an observed consequence has been for drivers to drop off passengers and drive empty buses around to avoid parking/idling fines. This action eliminates parking and idling but makes the problem worse by emitting more pollutants and increasing traffic congestion.

Solutions

For jurisdictions wanting to address this issue, the road to change is not merely the proverbial stick. The carrot is extremely important. Business economics trump a parking citation. The solution involves the jurisdiction, the public, the customers, the company owners, and the drivers. A good consultant can help navigate through this process and bring home the fact that the end to engine idling eventually comes down to a driver and an ignition switch. Create an environment where the driver understands why it's important and how he/she benefits, and the battle is won. Without a good consultant, that is not an easy nut to crack. **P**



RICHARD B. EASLEY, CAPP, is president of E-Squared Engineering and a member of IPI's Consultants Committee. He can be reached at reasley@e-squared.org or 703.858.9545.