



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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August 12, 2005

Gina McCarthy
Commissioner



Dear Health Director:

The first day of school is nearly upon us, and so is an opportunity for us to partner with schools to protect the health of the children in their care. The Department of Environmental Protection is working to foster awareness of the public health and environmental impacts of mobile source emissions and consequences of idling. I am writing to request your assistance in communicating this important message to Connecticut's schools, specifically about the health impacts of diesel pollution and how we can all work together to reduce the risk at schools. We hope you will join us in our education and outreach efforts by working with the schools in your health district.

Under Special Act 05-07, which Governor Rell signed on June 24, 2005, the Department of Environmental Protection is developing a diesel mitigation plan for submission to the General Assembly in January 2006. One of the ways the Department is already highlighting the importance of reducing risk exposure and addressing urban air quality issues is through our air quality curriculum at schools, currently implemented in the Norwich and New Haven school systems. Reducing unnecessary idling is another simple, cost effective way we can help schools to reduce children's exposure to air pollution, and thereby lessen the potential for the aggravation of asthma and reduce the likelihood of developing other pollution-linked serious health problems. Because idling school buses are implicated as a major contributor to the diesel exhaust exposure of children, the Department has offered free "No-Idling" signs to Connecticut public schools. No-Idling Signs have proven effective in reminding school bus drivers, as well as parents, that the simple act of turning off an engine can protect air quality and thereby help reduce the health threat posed by diesel emissions.

In April, I contacted all of Connecticut's Public School Superintendents informing them of the availability of the signs. The response has been very favorable, with over half of Connecticut's school districts responding with requests for signs. We applaud the many schools that enthusiastically requested signs and we are continuing to distribute the requested signs. You can help further our efforts by contacting your local school administrators to support or encourage their participation in this program. If you have any questions or find that schools in your health district have not yet requested signs, Allison O'Neil Ferraro is available at (860) 424-3702 to assist you.

We look forward to your support for this effort to protect public health, to your enthusiasm to get signs posted at all schools, and to help us further our education and outreach effort to lessen the health impacts of air pollution. I have asked my staff to attend the October 20, 2005 Public Health Directors meeting and discuss ways we can collaborate further on issues to improve air quality and protect public health.

Thank you for your interest in and support of this very important public health issue.

Yours truly,

Gina McCarthy
Commissioner