

January 5, 2006

Patricia Downs,

I am a clergy person in Middletown and the president of a local environmental organization, the Jonah Center for Earth and Art. I have worked on my own, off and on, for 10 years to stop school buses from idling and creating a hazardous cloud of carbon monoxide and particulates in the area where children come out to board buses. My efforts have been somewhat successful but we have a long way to go. I still find buses idling for 30 minutes in 50 degree temperature. I fully support all the legislation and efforts to date to stop this idling and clean up school buses and other diesel engines.

For some reason, school bus drivers tend to leave buses idling no matter what the temperature, and when I have asked them to turn the engine off, they invariably do so. When I have asked if they are aware of a non-idling policy, they always say no. Education of drivers is key, but they are not getting the message from the bus companies and schools, even when I have succeeded in getting the school to communicate with the bus company management. Imposing a fine on a school bus driver would be painful to do except on repeat offenses, but the desire of drivers to stay warm while waiting is surely a significant factor. Imposing a fine on the company as well may motivate the company to make the anti-idling policy clear to the drivers.

One question: What is the purpose or reasoning behind the exception: "when it is necessary to maintain a safe temperature for children with special needs." I can't help but wonder what special needs would justify creating the fog of pollution that idling buses create? What special needs make it necessary for a student to enter a bus that is warm, but full of carbon monoxide and diesel particulates. I'm not being sarcastic completely. I intend to promote compliance with anti-idling legislation and policies here in Middletown, but I would really like to know the reasoning behind this exception. My concern about the exception is that a school bus driver could tell a monitor "there is a child who rides of this bus that needs to have the bus warmed up before s/he enters" without having to specify what the need is.

Thank you,

The Rev. John C. Hall
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The Jonah Center for Earth and Art