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**ACE Paper 23/2007**  
*For discussion*

## Public Consultation on Banning Idling Vehicles with Running Engines

### PURPOSE

This paper consults Members on the proposal for requiring motorists to switch off vehicle engines while idling on the basis of the consultation document at **Enclosure**.

### BACKGROUND

2. Some drivers do not switch off the engines of their vehicles while waiting in order to run their air-conditioning systems for comfort. Although such emissions are small in quantity as compared to emissions from the entire vehicle fleet, they cause air pollution, heat and noise nuisance to the nearby pedestrians and shops. The nuisance problem is more apparent during bad air pollution days. **Table 1** below sets out the comparison of the emissions from an idling vehicle with running engine and a moving vehicle. An idling diesel public light bus (PLB) or a heavy-duty vehicle with running engine still produces considerable emissions particularly in respect of carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides. As for an idling petrol private car, the running engine emits almost as much carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons as a moving vehicle.

**Table 1: Comparison of emissions  
while vehicles are running and idling  
without switching off engines**

	Emission in gram per minute								
	Carbon monoxide		Nitrogen oxides		Hydrocarbons		Particulates		All pollutants
	Running	Idling	Running	Idling	Running	Idling	Running	Idling	
<b>Private car (unleaded petrol)</b>	4.92	4.00	0.68	0.20	0.39	0.31	Negligible	Negligible	0
<b>PLB (diesel)</b>	0.53	0.30	0.93	0.50	0.29	0.08	0.25	0.044	0
<b>Heavy- duty vehicle (diesel)</b>	3.73	2.00	4.92	2.00	0.98	0.21	0.58	0.042	0

*Assumptions – Average speed is 25 km/hr.*

*Effect of air conditioning included in the figures.*

3. From July 2000 to January 2001, the Government consulted the transport trades, 18 District Councils (DCs) and the Legislative Council (LegCo) on banning idling engines by legislation. There was no consensus on the issue at that time. Many considered it impracticable to introduce a total ban on idling vehicles because of the operational needs of the transport trades. Some were worried about putting the health of the drivers and the passengers at risk if the air-conditioning system had to be switched off when the weather was hot. Some pointed out that should the control scheme allow for a grace period for a vehicle to keep its engine running after coming to a stop, it would give rise to major enforcement problem particularly over how the length of the grace period was to be counted. There was also concern that some drivers might circumvent the control by circulating on the road, resulting in more emissions and possibly traffic congestion problems. A summary of the views expressed in the consultation is at **Annex A to the Enclosure**.

4. In view of the lack of consensus in the community, the Government did not pursue the statutory ban and resorted to strengthening public education to promote the good practice of switching off idling engines. Details of these publicity and educational programmes are at **Annex B to the Enclosure**.

5. However, with the growing concern about air quality and global warming, there have been marked changes in the sentiments of the community which now favour more direct and stronger control from the Government. These are also reflected in the increasing number of complaints against idling vehicles in the last few years (see **Table 2** below). On 7 December 2005, LegCo passed a motion requesting, amongst a package of measures to curb the trend of continuing deterioration of air quality in Hong Kong, the Government to introduce legislation to require motorists to switch off the engines of their vehicles while waiting and accord priority to regulate emissions from idling engines of private cars and government vehicles. To respond to the public aspirations, we need to go beyond the educational approach and identify effective means to control idling vehicles.

**Table 2: Number of complaints against idling vehicles  
with running engines received in 2002 to 2006**

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Number of complaints	238	236	296	308	501

## **PROPOSAL**

6. We propose that, as a general rule, the ban be imposed territory-wide including private roads whose traffic control has been handed over to the Administration. If a driver does not switch off the engine of his vehicle when it is idle, he commits a "contravention". Therefore, we propose that the punishment is a fixed penalty - the driver of the concerned vehicle will be issued with a fixed penalty ticket with a fine of \$320.

7. Making reference to overseas practice and the views collected in the last public consultation exercise, we propose that exemptions be given to –

- (a) vehicles which stop at the roadside for active boarding or alighting, i.e. exemption will not be given to standing vehicles not conducting boarding or alighting activities;
- (b) the first two taxis at a taxi stand and the first two PLBs at a PLB stand. The exemption is in line with the statutory requirement for the drivers of the first two taxis at a taxi stand to sit in or stand beside their taxis and for the drivers of the first two PLBs at a PLB stand not to leave their vehicles;
- (c) taxis, PLBs, or buses at their designated stops or stands either on-street or at termini, which are in the process of passenger boarding or alighting. The exemption will also apply to taxis and PLBs in a moving queue at their designated stops, stands or termini for their turns to pick up passengers;
- (d) vehicles remaining motionless because of traffic conditions including traffic congestion, accidents and stopping as directed by traffic signs, road markings, traffic lights or police officers;
- (e) security transit vehicles operated by a security company holding a valid Security Company Licence issued by the Security and Guarding Services Industry Authority under the Security and Guarding Services Ordinance (Cap. 460) for the provision of armoured transportation services;
- (f) vehicles which are required to run their engines (including on-board auxiliary engines) for some ancillary purposes other than providing air-conditioning for comfort of passengers and drivers. Examples of such vehicles include lorry cranes, aerial platforms, mobile concrete pumps, traffic warning signs and refrigerator trucks. However, exemption will not be given to vehicles running their on-board auxiliary engines for providing air-conditioning for comfort of passengers and drivers;
- (g) vehicles of disciplinary forces and other emergency vehicles such as those of the Civil Aid Service, Auxiliary Medical Services and the St. John's Ambulance while engaged in operational activities, including training activities; and
- (h) vehicles engaged in a parade or any other event authorized by the Transport Department.

8. To cater for the unique requirements of the local community, we propose that on the advice of the Secretary for the Environment, the Government may exempt, by publishing a notice in the Gazette, particular zones or particular periods of time (including months or days or hours) from the statutory ban to cater for the varying conditions of particular districts. Suitable road signs and markings will be displayed to identify such geographical or temporal exemptions. In deciding on the exemption, the Government will consider the views of the DCs concerned.

9. We propose that the contravention should not be based on how long an idling vehicle has kept its engine running as this will create an intractable enforcement problem and could lead to dispute between the law enforcement officers and the drivers.

## **ENFORCEMENT**

10. While pursuing an environmental policy objective, banning idling vehicles is an act which relates to the manner how a vehicle parks or stops on roads. Traffic Wardens, who are now enforcing against illegal vehicle parking, will be tasked to enforce the ban in addition to their regular traffic duties. Additional manpower resources will be required for enforcing the proposed ban. To supplement Traffic Wardens' enforcement action, Environmental Protection Inspectors will also be empowered to enforce the ban. Estimate of additional staff required will be worked out based on public's views collected in the consultation and the final arrangement of enforcement logistics.

## **OTHER OPTIONS**

11. Over the past several years, we organised a series of large scale publicity events to encourage drivers to switch off engines while waiting, including joint functions with DCs, the Environmental Campaign Committee, schools, housing estates and transport trades. However, the promotional efforts alone did not seem to have sufficient effect to change the behaviour of drivers. The number of complaints against idling vehicles continued to rise in the last few years. LegCo further passed a motion requesting Government to ban idling vehicles with running engines in December 2005. While we will continue to step up our educational efforts, the Government has to use legislative means to effectively control idling vehicles in order to further reduce roadside emissions.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSAL**

12. Emissions from idling vehicles with running engines affect public health and the quality of our environment. The proposal can protect our citizens, especially patients and students who are more vulnerable to the health impact and nuisance of idling vehicle emissions.

## **PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

13. We kicked off a five-month consultation exercise on 2 November 2007 to seek the public's view on the proposed ban. The consultation documents are available at offices of the Environmental Protection Department (EPD), the Transport Department, District Offices and the website of EPD ([www.epd.gov.hk/epd/idling](http://www.epd.gov.hk/epd/idling)).

## **ADVICE SOUGHT**

14. Members are invited to offer their views and comments on the proposal.

**Environmental Protection Department  
November 2007**