

Vermont panel OKs crackdown on truck idling

By Lisa Rathke, Associated Press Writer | January 26, 2010

MONTPELIER, Vt. --A Vermont legislative committee approved a bill that would crack down on the idling of trucks, a measure that proponents say will reduce air pollution and health risks while saving businesses money.

The House Natural Resources and Energy Committee voted unanimously Tuesday in favor a legislation to restrict idling of vehicles weighing more than 10,000 pounds -- trucks and buses -- to five minutes.

"I think it's important from a public education viewpoint," said Committee Chairman Tony Klein. "I think that's what the bill accomplishes. It's not a hammer."

But the trucking community was miffed that the bill, which last week appeared headed toward limiting idling in all vehicles, didn't also target cars.

"That was my recommendation ... that the trucking community would be happy to go along with that as long as it didn't single out one particular vehicle," said Edward Miller of the Vermont Truck and Bus Association.

The 240 truck and bus owners and operators he represents are serious about reducing idling, he said. "They see the money going out of the stack," he said.

Reducing unnecessary idling can save fuel, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, cut air pollution and save money. A typical long-haul tractor-trailer that eliminates unnecessary idling could save over 900 gallons of fuel each year, remove 9 metric tons of carbon dioxide, reduce nitrogen oxide and particulate matter emissions and save \$3,600 in fuel costs, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Breathing diesel fumes can cause sickness while the long-term exposure increases the risk of lung cancer, according to the American Lung Association.

About 44 states and municipalities have various anti-idling laws for trucks, but Vermont is the only New England state that does not. Vermont bans the idling of school buses on school grounds, and Burlington restricts both cars and trucks from idling for more than three minutes.

A number of companies already restrict truck idling.

It's a no-brainer, said William Becker, executive director of the National Association of Clean Air Agencies.

"The public understands the thick noxious suffocating exhaust coming from trucks and they simply can't stand to see the idling trucks polluting their localities," Becker said.

The bill makes exceptions, including for public safety vehicles, trucks with cabs designed for drivers to sleep in them and trucks that must idle to deliver fuel or do other work.

Violators will be fined \$10 the first time and \$50 for a second violation. ■