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Anti-idling campaign a huge success at SCS

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By Peg Rosenau

The air is a lot cleaner at Shelburne Community School thanks to the efforts of a student-lead campaign to reduce idling, the practice of leaving one's car running while it is not moving. Begun back in September, the program started when SCS was chosen as one of eight Vermont schools to partner with the organization Idle-Free VT for their 2015-16 anti-idling campaign. The first step was to determine just how much idling was going on at the school. In October, members of Lisa Phelps' 8th grade science class and the SCS Environmental Club spent several days at student pick-up times stealthily collecting data on the number of idling vehicles, the vehicle types, and the length of time that each vehicle was left running. After analyzing the data, they discovered that over 300

gallons of fuel were burned and 6100 pounds of carbon dioxide were emitted over the school year just during pick -up times.

Motivated to reduce the negative effects of idling- including air pollution, contribution to global warming, and unnecessary fuel use- the students got busy working on an outreach campaign.

Permanent metal “No Idling” signs were placed in the parking lot, students wrote letters for the SCS newsletter, and signs and banners were created that were displayed in the parking lot during a series of driver contact events. Students also handed out information sheets to drivers with information about the negative effects of idling and the new law in Vermont that bans idling for over five minutes during a one hour stretch, as well as “turn your key be idle free” car window decals.

“For the most part, people were really on board, and said they would change their habits” said Ethan Harvey, a Winton House 8th grader, “but some people thought that idling was a good idea because it is better for your car to leave it running. That’s not true though- it is actually better for the engine to shut it off and restart it rather than leave it running.”

“People did not know it is the law in Vermont” said Lisa Bean, another Winton 8th grader, “but it has been the law for over two years now. It is all about keeping the air clean, especially for kids. Pollution affects their lungs more than it does adults.”

As with any campaign, the students would only know if their efforts were successful after taking follow-up data. In April, on days with temperature and weather conditions similar to those of the initial observation days, students again collected data without letting drivers know what they were up to. After compiling the data and analyzing it with the help of Idle-Free VT, they were thrilled with the positive results. “We reduced idling rates by 79%!” said 8th grader, Jessica Ke, “that means our efforts reduced fuel use by hundreds of gallons. It’s a pretty amazing reduction.”

“The bigger goal” says Emile Cohen, a 7th grade member of the SCS Environmental Club, “is to start a trend of changing idling habits everywhere. No one really wants to call the police because of idling. We want everyone to stop idling because it is the right thing to do and makes the world a healthier place.”