

# Fact Sheet

## Idling: Myths vs. Reality

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### Myth #1

**The engine should be warmed up before driving.**

### Reality

True, the engine must be warmed up, but idling is not an effective way to do it, even in cold weather. The best way to warm up the engine is to drive the vehicle. With today's modern engines, and the advent of electronic engines, you need just about 30 seconds of idling before driving away, even on the coldest winter days. The vehicle's engine warms twice as quickly if driven instead of idled. Easing a vehicle into a drive will also speed up warming or cooling of the cabin's interior.

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### Myth #2

**Idling is good for your engine.**

### Reality



Excessive idling can actually damage your engine components, including cylinders, spark plugs, and exhaust systems. An idling engine is not operating at its peak temperature, which means that fuel does not undergo complete combustion. This leaves fuel residue that can condense on cylinder walls, where it can contaminate the oil and damage parts of the engine.

For example, fuel residues are often deposited on spark plugs. As you spend more time idling, the average temperature of the spark plug drops. This makes the plug get dirty more quickly, which increases fuel consumption by four to five percent. Excessive idling also allows water to condense in the vehicle's exhaust, leading to corrosion and reduced life span of the exhaust system.

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### Myth #3

**Shutting off and restarting your vehicle is hard on the engine.**

### Reality

Frequently restarting has little impact on engine components like the battery and starter motor. Component wear caused by restarting the engine is estimated to add \$10 per year to the cost of driving, money likely to be saved many times over due to fuel savings.

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### Myth #4

**Shutting off and restarting your vehicle uses more gas than if you leave it running.**

### Reality

Engine studies have shown that idling for more than approximately ten seconds burns more fuel than stopping and restarting (Emissions Research and Measurement Division, Environment Canada, 2000).

As a rule of thumb, if you are going to stop for 10 seconds or more - except in traffic - turn off the engine. You'll save money, and you won't produce harmful carbon dioxide, the leading greenhouse gas.

Sources: Hamilton County Environmental, Environmental Defense Fund

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