

MINIMIZING STUDENT'S EXPOSURE TO SCHOOL BUS DIESEL EXHAUST

Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.885 provides that operators of diesel school buses must minimize, to the extent possible, the idling of school bus engines and exposure of children to diesel exhaust fumes.

In addition, by July 1, 2003, diesel school buses must be parked and loaded at sufficient distance from school air-intake systems to avoid diesel fumes from being drawn into the systems, unless, in the judgment of the school board, alternative locations block traffic, impair student safety or are not cost effective.

According to the American Council of Science and Health (ACSH), diesel exhaust has been associated with a small increase in lung cancer risk in some epidemiological studies involving occupational exposures. Typically, occupational diesel exhaust exposures are far greater than ambient exposures to which children would likely be exposed. The ACSH knows of no published studies that link non-occupational exposure to diesel exhaust with increased cancer risk.

However, school districts must continue to work to ensure that the safety of their students is held to the highest standard. It may be unsafe to move school bus loading and unloading areas to a site farther from the school. Also, districts may not have sufficient resources to change the air-intake systems on their school buildings. The Environmental Protection Agency has outlined some steps districts can take to reduce diesel pollution. They are:

- 1) "When school bus drivers arrive at loading or unloading areas to drop off or pick up passengers, they should turn off their buses as soon as possible to eliminate idling time and reduce harmful emissions. The school bus should not be restarted until it is ready to depart.
- 2) "If buses need the engine to run the flashing lights, consider changing the circuit configurations so that the flashing lights can be powered by the battery without the engine running.
- 3) "At school bus depots, limit the idling time during early morning warm-up to what is recommended by the manufacturer (generally 3 to 5 minutes). In colder climates, block heaters, which plug into electrical outlets, can help warm the engine to avoid starting difficulties and shorten warm-up time.
- 4) "In the winter, provide a space inside the school where bus drivers who arrive early can wait."

In addition, a school district may want to shut the building air-intake systems down during the loading and unloading process. The air-intake systems may have to remain closed for a period of time after the buses leave to ensure that any diesel exhaust in the area has dissipated.

These steps will lessen the students' and drivers' exposure to diesel exhaust and will keep the loading and unloading process safe. There will be an economic benefit also because of the reduced fuel consumption as a result of less idling.