

The **AFSZ** is a project of
Real World Foundation

Asthma Free School Zone Newsletter

Asthma Prevention, Environmental Protection & Community Empowerment in a Neighborhood Setting

AFSZ Appearances Here & There

Amer. Public Health Assoc.
Sessions 5007 & 5105
Washington, DC
November 7, 2007

News 12, Brooklyn
24/7 News
October 22, 2007

WABC Channel 7
6 o'clock News
October 18, 2007

Press Conference
John Liu, NYC Council
District 20, Queens
Transportation Chair
City Hall, NYC
October 17, 2007 ~ 12 AM

"Idle Hands"
The New Yorker
Talk of the Town
October 15, 2007

Press Conference
New Ed. Law Section 3637
Peter Rivera, NYS
Assemblyman, Bronx, NY
CPE 2, E. 104th St., NYC
Sept. 26, 2007 ~ 10:00 AM

No-Idling Day in East Harlem

On September 26th, AFSZ hosted a No-Idling Day on East 104th Street where four schools, PS 171, Central Park East II, the Reece School, and Boys and Girls Harbor, all share one block. High asthma rates and notable street traffic during the school day made the 104th cluster a perfect candidate for the AFSZ program, which began work with the schools during the 2006-07 school year.

To prepare for No-Idling Day, school staff distributed letters to parents and teachers, younger classrooms received an idling lesson plan, including an "No Idling" coloring car. On the actual day, AFSZ enrolled its entire staff and a team of community volunteers to hit the streets during drop-off time, giving out No-Idling cards. The group, easily identified by their "Idle-Free School Zone" T-shirts, greeted parents, bus and passenger car drivers as students arrived. Several parents shut off the engine right away and thanked the volunteers for being there. Some drivers asked for bundles of cards to give to friends, staff and co-workers.



Governor Signs School Bus Idling Law

NYS has taken an important step closer to protecting school children from tail-pipe emissions. In August NY Governor Spitzer signed the *Idle Free School Zone* law, banning all bus idling in school zones. Assemblyman Peter Rivera (Bronx Dist. 76), introduced the legislation, which was recommended by AFSZ last winter. On September 26th, a press conference announcing the law, Ed. Law Sec. 3637, was held in East Harlem. The new law gives teeth to the school bus agreements secured in 2004-05 by then Attorney General Spitzer—which happened after a tip from the AFSZ about rampant bus idling at elementary schools.

NYC Council Intro Limits School Zone Idling

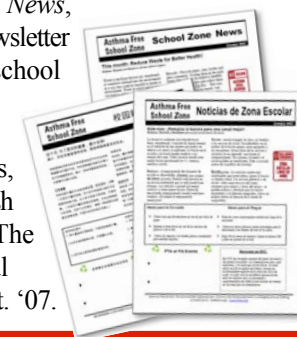
At a press conference on Oct. 17th, NYC Council Member John Liu announced the introduction of legislation to limit all idling in school zones to one minute—an idea proposed by AFSZ last spring. There are 3 reasons to celebrate: recognition of the school zone as a microenvironment deserving protection; and of all engine idling as harmful (not just by school buses); and introduction of idling in the training and licensing of TLC drivers. Look for *Intro. 163-2007* on www.nyc.gov.

The New Yorker looks at AFSZ Air Sampling

A staff writer from The New Yorker visited our air sampling site at PS 274 Her 10/15/07 *Talk of the Town* article caught the attention of friends, strangers and bloggers. Visit our website to read Lizzie Widdicombe's piece, *Idle Hands*, browse the blogs and admire the drawing of well-dressed, "academic-looking" AFSZ staffers! (www.afsz.org)

SZNews in Chinese!

School Zone News, a monthly newsletter for the AFSZ school community is now available in 3 languages, English, Spanish and Chinese. The first tri-lingual issue was Sept. '07.



Our New Office

The AFSZ has a beautiful new office, in the East Village, at 131 Avenue B, Charlie Parker Place, NYC, NY 10009. Come visit! Ring buzzer #4; tap on the streetside first floor windows; or call 212-533-6615, our main number.



Idle Hands

by Lizzie Widdicombe October 15, 2007

If you go to school in Bushwick, Brooklyn, you may have noticed, along-side the cotton-candy sellers and the babysitters who gather on the curb around 3 P.M., several academic-looking women making notes on clipboards. The clipboards are covered with voter-registration stickers, though if you ask the women about voting, or anything else—where the lunchroom is, when the third graders get out—you'll be met with blank stares and a vague answer: "We're not with the school" or "We're studying the air."

The women belong to a nonprofit group called the Asthma Free School Zone, which, for the past year, has been holding covert stakeouts of schools around the city to aid a campaign against vehicle idling. New York City prohibits idling for spurts of longer than three minutes (the fine is from three hundred and fifty to two thousand dollars), though the law is rarely enforced. In 2004, after receiving a tip from the A.F.S.Z., Eliot Spitzer, who was the attorney general at the time, sued several school-bus companies for breaking the rule, and last month, as governor, Spitzer signed a ban on all bus idling in school zones. "In Switzerland you have to turn your engine off if you're more than four cars behind the stoplight," Rebecca Kalin, the group's founder, said the other day. "Idling is rude there. It's like burping—you just don't do it."



Kalin had arrived at P.S. 274 a little before two o'clock, with three colleagues: Lori Bukiewicz, a public-health worker; Jen Richmond-Bryant, an assistant professor at Hunter College (courses: Ventilation, Indoor and Outdoor Air Quality); and Bin-Yun Zheng, the group's assistant. When no one was looking, they wheeled out a small gray cabinet with a plastic tube sticking out of the top. The cabinet emitted a low buzzing noise, and it contained a car battery, two Sidepaks—used to gauge air quality by counting small particles called PM2.5—and an instrument called an Aethelometer, which measures black carbon. They attached an additional Sidepak to the belt of Desiree Maldonado, a crossing guard and an accomplice. "My role is wearing this gadget for as long as I'm out here," Maldonado said, pointing to the device on her hip, which was blue and vibrating. She breathed in. "I'm so used to the air here, I can't even tell you if it's polluted. I know I get sick a lot. I used to sing high soprano, and I can't anymore. This job has ruined my vocal cords."

As school let out, Bukiewicz and Richmond-Bryant recorded the traffic patterns by making hash marks that denoted the type of passing vehicle (short bus, long bus, truck, car) and whether the light was red or green. Zheng kept track of idling. (Kalin: "It's like the saying about pornography: you know it when you see it.") At two-thirty-three, a green Honda pulled up to the curb. Two girls wearing school uniforms got out while the driver stayed at the wheel.

"There's one right there," Kalin whispered. "See? He's still got his taillights on."

A few minutes later, the girls skipped back into view, holding hot dogs. Zheng made a note under "Comments": "Hot-dog purchase for kids." The Honda continued to idle, and Kalin inhaled deeply. "You smell it? The fumes?"

Shortly before three o'clock, there was a car accident—someone crashed into a Dumpster down the block and drove off—and a man ran into the street waving a hubcap. "Lotta action in Brooklyn," Kalin said, but her attention was fixed on a nearby Lincoln Town Car, which was stationed against the curb. Kalin wandered over to the car and, looking straight ahead, pretended to steady herself while rubbing her hand over the hood. "It looks like it's not idling," she said when she returned. "Sometimes you have to just touch the engine." In an hour and a half, there had been twelve idlers: seven cars, one truck, and four school buses. The PM2.5 reading was on the high side.

After three weeks of monitoring the air quality around the school, the group will begin a public-awareness campaign. (The mayor's office will roll out a similar campaign in 2008.) "We'll be out here with flyers and metal signs that say, 'Idling Gets You Nowhere,'" Bukiewicz said. "We'll hold parent- and teacher-training classes. We'll go gangbusters on them." ♦