

Region adopts idle-free policy in effort to cut down on smog

Halton Region is doing its part to cut down the amount of smog-causing exhaust fumes from vehicles that dirty our air.

The region started a new idle-free policy last Monday. It calls for regional vehicles to be turned off if a person will be away from it for more than three minutes while visiting any one of the 30 buildings operated by Halton, like wastewater treatment plants.

The policy also extends to regional employees who use their own vehicles while at Halton building sites, as well as to the public and trucks dropping off deliveries.

The idle-free policy was created in May by Halton Partners for Clean Air, a group comprised of municipalities, school boards, hydro utilities and Conservation Halton to address smog issues. The policy was brought forward by the region's public health department and endorsed by Halton's senior staff.

It didn't require a regional council vote to be enacted.

The primary reason for starting the idle-free policy in the fall was to remind everyone that smog is a year-round concern and not simply a danger in the summer months when it's at its worst, said Becky Jas, an environmental health specialist with the region.

"We want to set an example for the community," she said.

Motorists will see at a dozen or so regional sites a metal sign asking them to, "Turn engine off, spare our air."

Jas said these signs will be posted at Halton sites that have higher traffic volumes and more employees to maximize their message.

Smog is a problem especially for municipalities with urban populations. Oakville suffers some of the poorest air quality in the GTA in the summer.

Health Canada estimates more than 5,000 Canadians die prematurely each year because of air pollution.

Halton is among a few Ontario municipalities that have adopted an idle-free policy to help clean the air. Similar policies exist in Waterloo Region and Owen Sound.

Some municipalities have gone a step further and created an idle-free bylaw, including Oakville. It's bylaw requires vehicles to be shut off after five minutes of idling or risk a fine of \$200.

Halton Chair Joyce Savoline who is also a member of the region's health and social services committee, said the idle-free policy makes sense.

She said bettering air quality is part of the region's strategic plan and the idle-free policy is any easy way in helping achieve that.

"It's not a very complicated way to reduce air pollution," Savoline said.

—By Jason Misner, special

Advertorial

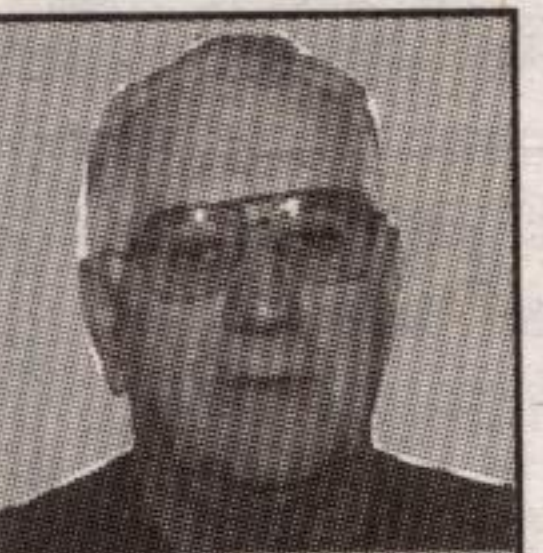
GIVING THANKS AT HALTON HILLS CHILD CARE CENTRE



The children at Halton Hills Child Care Centre enjoy a Thanksgiving feast arranged by the Centre's cook, Georgia. McMasters Meat and Deli on Main Street, Georgetown, graciously prepared the turkeys.

Halton Hills Child Care Centre, located on Park Avenue in Georgetown, has provided quality educational child care for up to 77 children since 1986. The Centre offers programs for children aged 18 months through 6 years. Three spaces for children under the age of 18 months who are able to walk on their own are available. There are four age groups consisting of Toddlers, Preschoolers, Junior and Senior Kindergarten.

The Centre follows a "theme-based" program that teaches the children about a weekly topic such as community helpers, the environment, insects and Canada. Included in the daily programs are learning activities involving science, simple math, crafts, phonics and violence prevention. Their day is a balance of fun and learning. The outdoor playground is located in natural surroundings with trees and the sounds of the river trickling by. A setting appropriate for a Centre influenced by the heritage of Halton Hills.




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