

Don't let the cold stop you from thinking green

-Kaydee Wilson, Public Affairs Intern, Hamilton County Department of Environmental Services

When the Cincinnati winter rolls in, it can be difficult to focus on anything other than staying healthy and keeping warm. As you prepare for the indoor season, remember that there are lots of ways to cut back on air pollution and continue to live green—even while the trees are bare.

For starters, try to improve on your idling habits. Idling—leaving your car running while parked—releases pollutants like CO₂ into the atmosphere, increasing global warming risks and endangering human health. To cut back on your vehicle emissions, resist the urge to warm up the car on frosty mornings and turn the car off while waiting to pick others up. After all, the fastest way to warm up a car is by driving it! Any way you look at it, idling is nothing but an unhealthy waste of gas and money.

Since well-tuned vehicles have better fuel efficiency, it's also important to stay on top of car maintenance. By keeping your car running at its best, you can further reduce vehicle emissions and save on gasoline.

The best way to reduce vehicle emissions is by limiting your driving time. Make it a habit to carpool or take the bus whenever you can. When you see others cleaning the salt and ice off of their cars during the next few months, you'll be glad you did.

You can also reduce air pollution from home by conserving energy use. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, heating costs make up over 68 percent of a typical utility bill. Reduce the cost and energy it takes to heat your home by ensuring that it is properly insulated and that any exterior holes or cracks are repaired before the winter chill arrives.

To cut down on appliance and lighting energy consumption, turn off lights and electrical devices that are not in use and replace incandescent bulbs with energy-efficient Compact Florescent (CFL) bulbs. Also keep in mind that many electronics continue to drain power even after they've been turned off. By plugging these devices into a power strip, you can completely cut off power and prevent unnecessary energy use with the flick of the strip's power switch.

There are lots of different ways to help the environment this winter season. By thinking green and making smart preparations and simple lifestyle changes, you can reduce air pollution and cut down on your energy bill at the same time.

The Hamilton County Department of Environmental Services (HCDOES)'s Air Quality Management Division serves Butler, Clermont, Hamilton and Warren counties. For more information about local air quality, visit the HCDOES website at www.hcdoes.org.