

KnoxNews

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: http://www.knoxnews.com/kns/perspectives/article/0,1406,KNS_2797_3540850,00.html

Yes: Cleaner cars mean cleaner air for our children

By **VALERIE TRUE**
February 13, 2005

Children in Knoxville breathe some of the dirtiest air in the nation.



NEWS SENTINEL

According to the American Lung Association, our small city ranks eighth in the nation for ozone air pollution and 12th in the nation for fine particle pollution. Knox County has failed to meet minimal health standards for air quality set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for both ozone and fine particle pollution, standards that many scientists feel are still not protective enough.

Yet Knox County officials are missing an opportunity to act responsibly, fighting tooth and nail against a simple, easy and inexpensive way individuals can help to clean the air -- vehicle inspection and maintenance.

To know the importance of clean air, all you need to do is talk to the parent of an asthmatic child about the emotional and financial costs. The dread they feel every time they need to rush to the hospital because their child cannot breathe, the expensive medicine and doctor's visits, their children getting behind in school because of missed days, not to mention the lost workdays.

The disappointment of the children when they find out that they cannot join the cheerleading squad or football team because the exertion on bad air days could send them to the emergency room and do permanent damage to their lungs. According to a report put out by the American Lung Association in 2004, there are more than 7,000 cases of pediatric asthma in Knox County alone.

Direct health impacts of air pollution on our friends, families, children and ourselves include asthma, chronic bronchitis, lung cancer, lung disease, respiratory irritation, heart attack and even shortened lives.

Modern technology and ingenuity has made it possible for car engines to operate far cleaner than years ago. Catalytic converters and on-board computers greatly reduce the emissions that a car releases when it is running properly.

A vehicle that is in need of a tune-up, has been tampered with or has some kind of leak emits over two and a half times the amount of pollution it would have if running properly. Annual inspection and maintenance of vehicles help identify these problems so the owner can get them fixed. Once the cars are fixed, many drivers find that their car burns less fuel, saving them more money at the gas pump.

The inspection and maintenance program in Davidson County has been quite successful in improving air quality in the Nashville area. The newly improved program is expected to eliminate 3,700 tons of pollutants from being released into the air every year. Davidson County, which was once out of compliance with EPA's much looser ozone standard, nearly met the far tighter ozone standard this time around.

It is also no longer part of American Lung Association's list of the top 25 most polluted cities in the nation and has received a "C" for ozone pollution compared to Knox County's solid "F".

Advertisement



The inspection program in Davidson County takes about 10 minutes, with a five-minute wait time, and costs just \$10. The \$10 fee pays for the operation of the test center, meaning there is little to no cost to the county. Fewer than seven out of every 100 cars registered in Nashville failed the inspection test, most undergoing repairs that cost less than \$100. Some counties have programs to assist low-income drivers with the expense incurred in repairing the vehicle due to emissions inspection.

Knoxville's air quality is bad enough that inspection and maintenance on passenger vehicles is not going to be enough to get the area to meet the federal standards for air quality. The state, county and local governments are going to have to take responsibility for getting additional pollution reductions from diesel trucks, coal-fired power plants, heavy-duty diesel equipment and industry. There is also a process for inspecting emissions from diesel engines that has been quite effective in the 15 states in the United States where the program has been implemented.

All of us who own a car share the responsibility for the poor air quality in Knoxville. We should also share the responsibility for cleaning it up. We all need to drive a little less and buy cars that are more fuel efficient, and we need to have our vehicles inspected to protect the children of East Tennessee from breathing unhealthy air.

Valerie True is the Clean Air Program coordinator for the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, a not-for-profit, nonpartisan organization working with citizens for clean air, clean water and healthy communities in the Southeast.

Copyright 2005, KnoxNews. All Rights Reserved.