

Open Letter to the Legislative Council's Bill Committee on Motor Vehicle Idling (Fixed Penalty) Bill

Dear Legislative Council Members,

As representatives of Hong Kong medical practitioners, we feel an imminent need to step up all measures that could bring about an immediate improvement to our air quality. We are worried that the hesitation shown in the recent debate on introducing the legislation to ban idling engine might cause further delay to the passage of this long awaited Bill which is needed to protect our people, be they elderly and children, pedestrians and drivers, from hazardous vehicular emission.

Hong Kong prides itself as a modern city with a reputable record of strong health and medical care. We see it part and parcel of our health care and environmental policy to ensure our people would not suffer from polluting emissions especially those that could have been avoided by progressive environmental policies and collective behavioral changes that commensurate with our state of economic development. Emission from idling engine is but one of these pollutants that could be eliminated if there are sufficient commitment from the Government, Legislative Council and support and consensus from the community at large.

Numerous studies and surveys including a well publicized one done by HKUST recently clearly demonstrated that a very high level of air pollution prevails in our densely populated urban areas where the bulk of our population patronize every day, as they work, live, learn and play. Our people, aged and young in particular, would have no choice but continue to inhale polluting air and are extensively exposed to an increasingly high risk of brain, respiratory and heart diseases as a result of deteriorating air quality.

While we continue to urge the Government to do its utmost in bringing about a full and comprehensive package of measures to further reduce all these pollution hazards from industry, energy and transportation sources, we consider the idling engine bill an important initial step to reduce emission that could have been substantially eliminated. Scientific overseas and Chinese studies have already confirmed traffic emission is a major cause of street level air pollution in busy cities (like Hong Kong). As young children are short and breathing at a lower level close to that of the vehicle exhaust pipe, "Hong Kong Children", would be the major victims of street level air pollution. We call for the society, including drivers and passengers, pedestrians and car users, to adopt the norm that vehicles should have their engine switched off when they wait idly on the street, save limited exemptions to suit very restrained operational requirements.

As medical practitioners, we seek to protect the health of all citizens including both people on the street and those behind the driving wheel. We firmly believe that emissions from idling engines are damaging the health of all street users both within and outside the vehicles.

We recognize that to make the scheme a success, we need to bring about collective behavioral changes and the introduction of the long debated Bill is just a small but crucial step towards this goal. Any excessive exemption or delay would just prolong the exposure our people to the health risk caused by vehicular emission.

We believe it is time for Legislative Council, the Government and all sectors of the community to show commitment to move on with this legislation and to act on all other pollution combating measures urgently and simultaneously. Our public, adult and children alike, deserve no less.

Yours faithfully,

The Hong Kong Paediatric Society

The Hong Kong Geriatric Society

The Hong Kong Asthma Society

The Hong Kong Society of Paediatric Respiriology

The Hong Kong Paediatric Nurses Association

Hong Kong Doctors Union

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