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cc Letters to the Editor <letters@scmp.com>
Subject Idling Engines permitted in taxi and bus stands?

Idling Engines permitted in taxi and bus stands?

Dear lawmakers and politicians, having followed the fairy tale of Hong Kong's law to ban idling engines, I am indeed surprised to see the continuous compromise of whom you shall support; a driver of a vehicle that pollutes so the fumes and pollution makes 1000's of Hong Kongers population sick, or supporting a healthy population and clean environment. Compromising a law is never easy or beneficial for its purpose; instead a clean cut would be the only choice.

I refer to "The government yesterday announced it would exempt all taxis queuing at taxi stands from a proposed ban on idling engines. The exemption will also apply to 16-seater school minibuses, not just bigger school buses as proposed earlier.

However, the full exemption will not be extended to public light buses....." SCMP Nov 13.

I can fully understand if the law case is built up from an 81 year old driver who died due to heat stroke, or another that was sent to hospital. But it does not refer whatsoever to those thousands of people that are sent to public or private hospitals due to lung disease or breathing problems, or small children that get asthma in the young years. First, the 81 year old driver should not have been in that vehicle in first place (that is a joke to even bring up as a defense of this decision). For others that got warm or hot in the cars in those indeed hot days of 35+ degrees, of course everyone gets warm in such conditions. If it is so hot, the driver has to get out from the vehicle and stand in the shade to cool of. What is the better; that one person gets warm and has to get out of his car, or hundreds or 10 people around this polluting vehicle gets uncomfortable and has to go to hospital?

Especially annoying is the lift of the ban for tour buses if they have customers waiting in the bus. Have in mind, it is not one single bus, it is thousands of tour buses idling! If the passenger complains when the bus is turned off, the passenger can get out of the bus and wait in the shade. When I pass those buses, I always knock on the door and ask him to turn it off. My family, my baby does not fell well due to the fumes from the bus (especially those old cheap tourbuses). So either stay out of Hong Kong dear tourist or cope with a stronger environmentally friendly law and step outside to breathe some fresh air.

A different approach than giving the drivers (or vehicles) the right to idle the engines would be to only allow it above 32 degrees (and not where they are). Or the other way around – any vehicle idling engines more than one minute in weather conditions below 32 degrees shall be fined with a maximum penalty of 1000 HKD.

A question we have to ask before making such statement is – which engines are the worst polluters? I would say, as a layman, tour buses, minibuses and diesel trucks. They are smoky and polluting heavily and run on old cheap diesel engines with normally cheap diesel as well.

The ambition and purpose of making a law must be to serve the community for its best and protect the population, not the businesses of the population. I am referring to Chinas promoting of the tobacco is the same stance HK government takes, protecting the community businesses rather than protecting the people. “go ahead and smoke, as long as we get tax from you”, or “please idle your engine as long as you have passengers stimulating your business so you pay tax to us”. As stupid as that.

There should be clear road signs set up in all taxi stands, and all bus or tourbus stands or places where the buses uses to stop for waiting for passengers or tourists. Idling engine maximum one minute. Exceeding 1 minute Penalty 1000 HKD. Care of our children!

How do other countries do?

If Hong Kong government and lawmakers do some research outside Hong Kong you will mostly (not always) find that the air is so much better, mainly because the ones that makes decisions are tougher, consistent, consequent and do not compromise, and they have a attitude of investing in the future of their population. Many of the European countries are good examples among many others. Hong Kong is not a good example.

For example, in Sweden and the Nordic countries where there has been a ban on idling engines for more than 20 years in most cities and regions, you shall have in mind when reading this, that it is *cold* many times throughout the year, meaning the driver may prefer keep the engine on so he does not freeze. Even though it is minus 5, minus 20 degrees, the drives must wear proper clothing or wait in a proper facility (warm or cold bld).

In Hong Kong, the driver (bus-taxi-truck drivers) doesn't want to be too hot or sweat. The Swedish ban of idling engines is very straight forward:

- Maximum one (1) minute of idling a motor driven engine in the cities.
- This is however not applicable when the vehicle is standing still, due to a traffic jam, nor because the vehicle needs to run its engine to dig a hole, or use the crane or clean the streets for example.
- Please note that is does not even bring up taxis in taxi stands or the weather

temperature.

- It specifically mentions that it is *not allowed to idle the engine to heat the vehicle or run the air-conditioning*. (did you understand?).

And there are taxi queues in Swedish cities too, and in other European cities where it is both cold and warm. A little help here though, many of the taxi queues in Hong Kong are actually moving, although slowly. Of course the engine can be on for the purpose of moving the vehicle forward within a reasonable time.

And bus drivers or taxi drivers who sleep or eat in their cars will get a fine if they run their engines due to have a more comfortable nap. As we see endless of tour buses with drivers sleeping in their vehicles, also now in cool wintertime, they keep their engines on. It is ruthless and without respect for surrounding people and should definitely be attached with a fine – and why not the “maximum 5000 dollar fine”. Fine the company, not the driver. The point with the idling engine ban is not conformance; the point is protecting environment, health, the future, minimize use of fuel. In addition, since the ban was introduced, the Swedish companies who have vehicles to fuel up, they have saved 10-14% of the fuel cost in a recent study in northern Sweden.

But again, no compromise, maximum one minute. So, in order to ease up your law proposal - just ban it. Maximum one minute, no matter what.

And if still have problems to understand or to come up with an applicable law without compromising, why not contact those governments that have experience? Because it is time to act now, as Hong Kong public is fed up with your fairy tale of making a decent non-compromising workable decision.

I kindly ask you to re-consider your decisions and recommendations as this is not a ban that will be workable in the long run, and not very beneficial for the public of Hong Kong. Now, start all over again and discuss what the purpose of an idling engine ban is, what would be beneficial and for whom. If you don't want to invent the wheel again, ask for guidance from other successful countries.

All in a kind try to make some recommendations for you.

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