



WHAT WE LEARNED REPORT

Idling Control By-law Review



Public Policy Development Services
Emergency and Protective Services Department
City of Ottawa
May 2024

1.0 Project Overview

1.1 Background

The City of Ottawa enacted its [Idling Control By-law](#) in 2007, restricting unnecessary vehicle idling to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution. In 2022, [City Council directed](#) Public Policy Development Services in the Emergency and Protective Services Department to review this by-law. The review of the Idling Control By-law is considering:

- the maximum idling time limit,
- existing and potential new exemptions to this limit,
- improved clarity to definitions,
- fine amounts, and
- enforcement tools and practices.

1.2 Report Purpose

This report summarizes the results from public and industry surveys and consultations. The feedback received will help inform final policy recommendations.

2.0 How We Engaged

This by-law review is posted to the City of Ottawa's [Engage Ottawa](#) website. Between late January and mid-March 2024, over one thousand participants completed a public survey (see [Appendix A](#)). Respondents were asked to identify where and why they see idling occur, and to provide their feedback on the existing by-law exemptions and to potential changes to the maximum idling time limit and existing temperature thresholds. Additional specific consultations occurred with accessibility groups and with the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Separate surveys were distributed to operators of vehicle categories that are currently exempted from idling regulations. Respondents provided information on when and why vehicle idling may be required for:

- engaging in normal farm practices,
- armoured vehicles when guarding or loading contents,
- private transit vehicles when passengers are embarking or disembarking,
- mobile workshop vehicles, and
- business operations in our community.

A separate survey for school boards and schools was also distributed to understand their potential concerns with idling, the reasons for idling on or near school property, and suggestions for the by-law review.

3.0 Key Findings

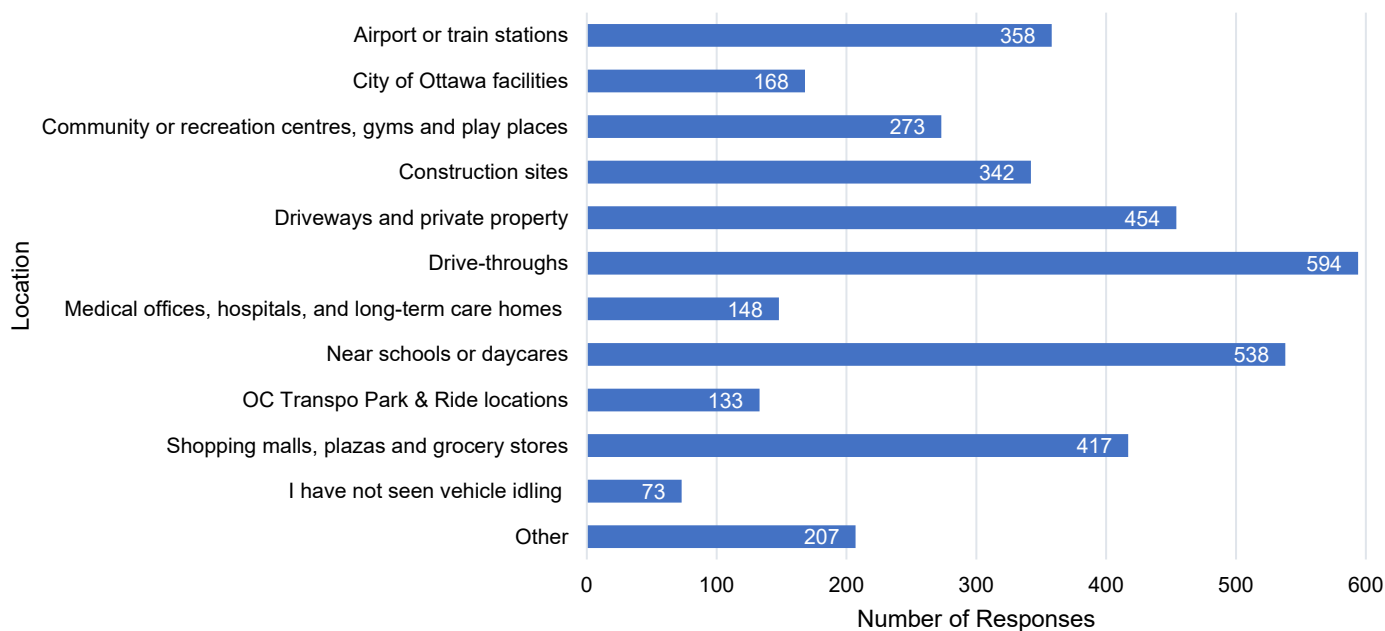
3.1 Health impacts

In the public survey, 61% of respondents have not or are currently not experiencing health impacts due to poor air quality, while 23% of respondents indicated that they experienced these impacts. The final 16% of respondents indicated that they were unsure or that they preferred not to answer.

3.2 Where does vehicle idling occur?

From the 1045 respondents to the public and business surveys, the following indicated where they see idling occurring in Ottawa, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Where does vehicle idling occur?



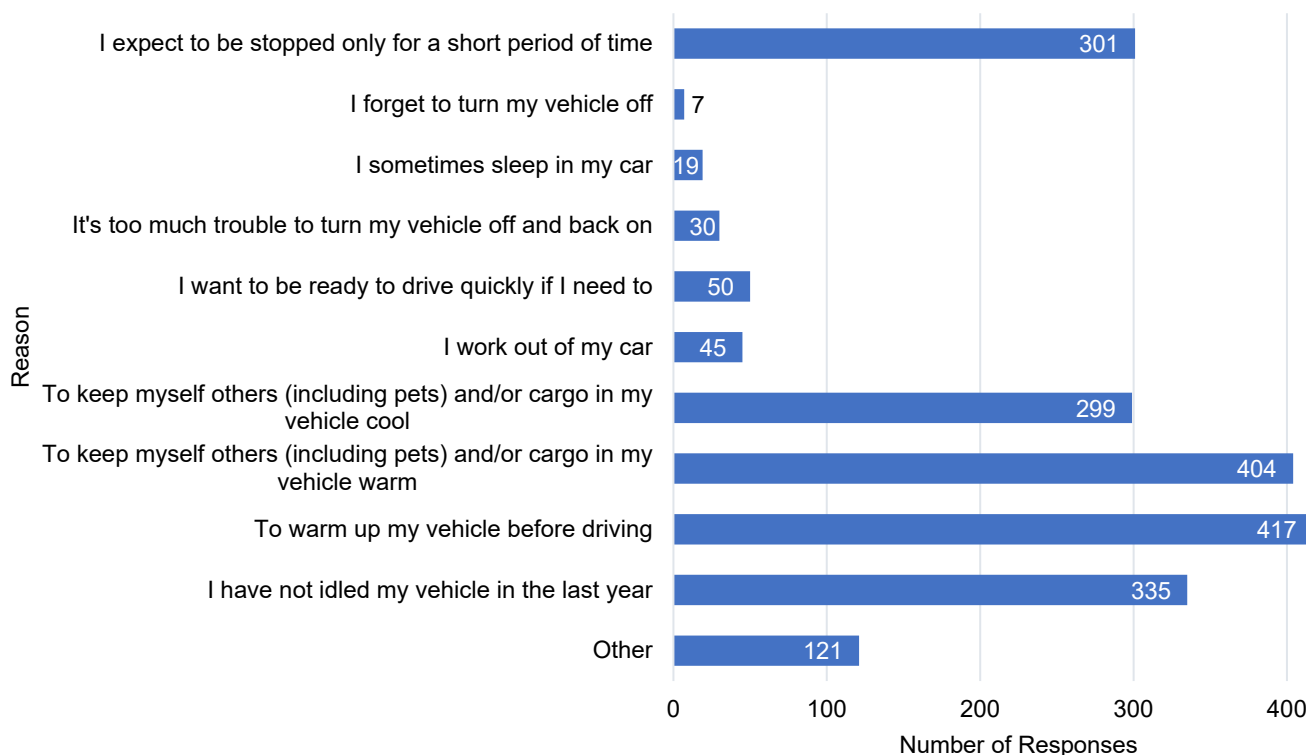
Respondents identified vehicle idling occurring most often at drive-throughs and near schools or daycares. From the 'other' category, the most frequent locations identified were:

- City right-of-way – 83
- With municipal vehicles – 53
- In traffic – 32

3.3 Why do you idle?

Respondents from the public and business surveys indicated the reasons for why they idle, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Why do you idle?



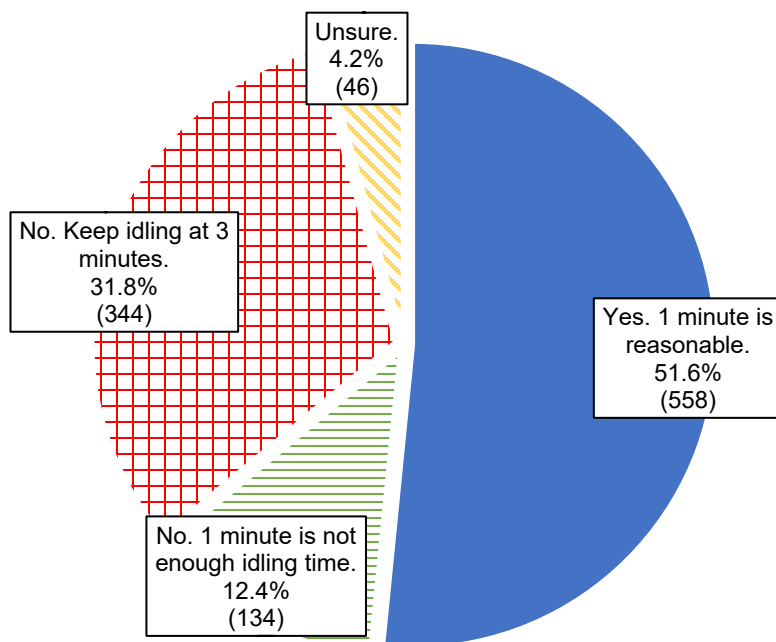
Respondents identified keeping themselves or their passengers warm or cool and warming the engine before driving as the most frequent reasons for why they idle. From the 'other' category, the most frequent reasons to idle were:

- I do not own and/or drive a vehicle – 24
- To defrost and/or defog the windows – 16
- Traffic congestion – 14
- I drive an electric or hybrid vehicle – 13
- For various mechanical reasons – 11

3.4 Reducing the maximum idling duration to 1 minute

Respondents from every survey considered whether the maximum idling time limit should be reduced from the current 3 minutes to 1 minute for vehicle types or situations not currently exempted, in alignment with [Natural Resources Canada](#) recommendations.

Figure 3. Should the City of Ottawa reduce the maximum idling time limit from 3 minutes to 1 minute?



Just over half of respondents (51.6%) agreed with a reduction to a maximum idling time limit of 1 minute. Just over forty-four per cent (44.2%) of respondents did not agree with a reduction to 1 minute, with 31.8% preferring the idling time limit remain at 3 minutes and 12.4% stating that an idling time limit of 1 minute is insufficient. The remaining 4.2% of respondents were unsure.

The most common themes for why respondents supported a 1 minute maximum idling time limit included:

- A reduction in emissions, pollution, and/or carbon footprint – 197
- There is no reason for a greater idling duration – 116
- A reduction would make education and enforcement simpler – 50
- 1 minute idling is sufficient to warm or cool interior and/or engine – 42
- Due to the National Resources Canada idling information – 42
- Modern vehicles do not require a long idling duration – 29

Conversely, the most common themes for why respondents did not support a 1 minute maximum idling time limit included:

- Not enough time to warm or cool interior and/or engine – 135
- Not a long enough idling duration – 94
- Not in support of an Idling Control By-law – 80
- The by-law is too difficult to enforce or not enforced enough – 58
- Not enough time to defrost or defog the vehicle – 20
- Would not impact overall emissions – 19

3.5 Exemptions

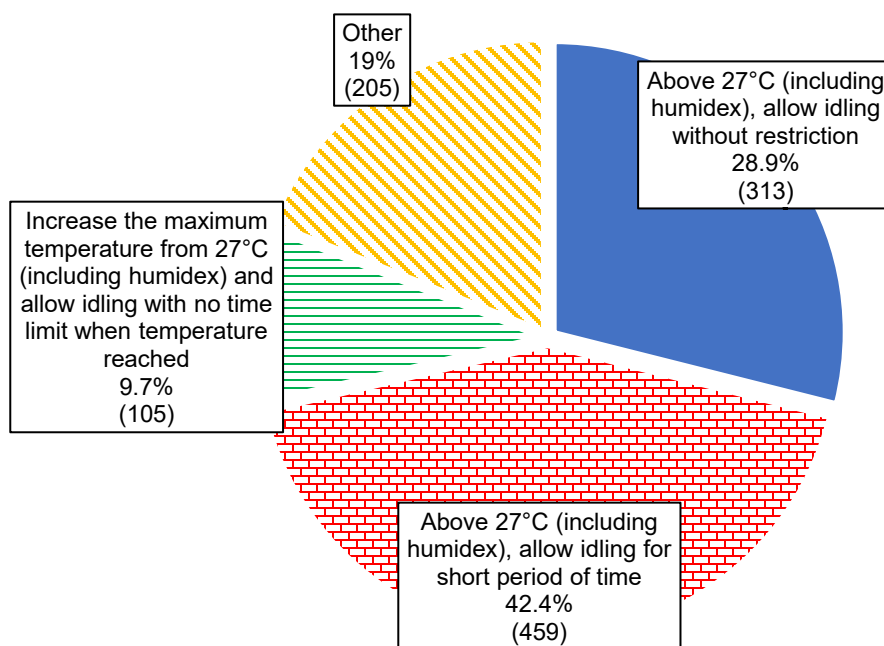
From the public and business surveys, most respondents agreed with most existing exemptions to the maximum idling time limit, with the medical letter and emergency assistance exemptions receiving the most support. The most disagreement indicated by respondents was with respect to Council-authorized events, armoured vehicles, and the mobile workshop exemptions.

Table 1. Percentage agreement with the existing exemptions to the maximum idling time limit.

Exemption	Agree	I do not agree or disagree	Disagree	I am not sure	I prefer not to say
Vehicles assisting in an emergency	81.9	5.3	7.8	4.2	0.8
Mobile workshops	38.8	12.3	30	18.1	0.8
For vehicle servicing and repair	56.9	10.4	20.4	11.4	0.8
Armoured vehicles when guarding or loading contents	53.4	8.1	31.8	6	0.7
Vehicles remaining motionless due to an emergency, traffic, weather, or mechanical difficulty	62.3	10	19.8	7.1	0.8
Vehicles in a parade, race, or Council-authorized event	41.5	11.1	38.5	8.1	0.8
Private transit vehicles when passengers are embarking or disembarking	57.6	9.1	29.4	3.3	0.6
Vehicles transporting individuals with a medical certificate requiring a certain internal temperature	88.2	4.2	3	3.7	0.9
City of Ottawa Vehicle and Equipment Idling Policy	52.9	8.2	28.8	9.3	0.8
Vehicles engaged in normal farm practices	50.5	10.5	25.6	12.5	0.9
Vehicles that eliminate emissions during idling phase	56.7	8.6	16.7	16.6	1.4

The temperature exemption currently permits unlimited idling for occupied vehicles when the exterior temperature is greater than 27°C (including humidex) or lower than 5°C (including windchill). The following represents respondents' views from all surveys on possible changes to this exemption.

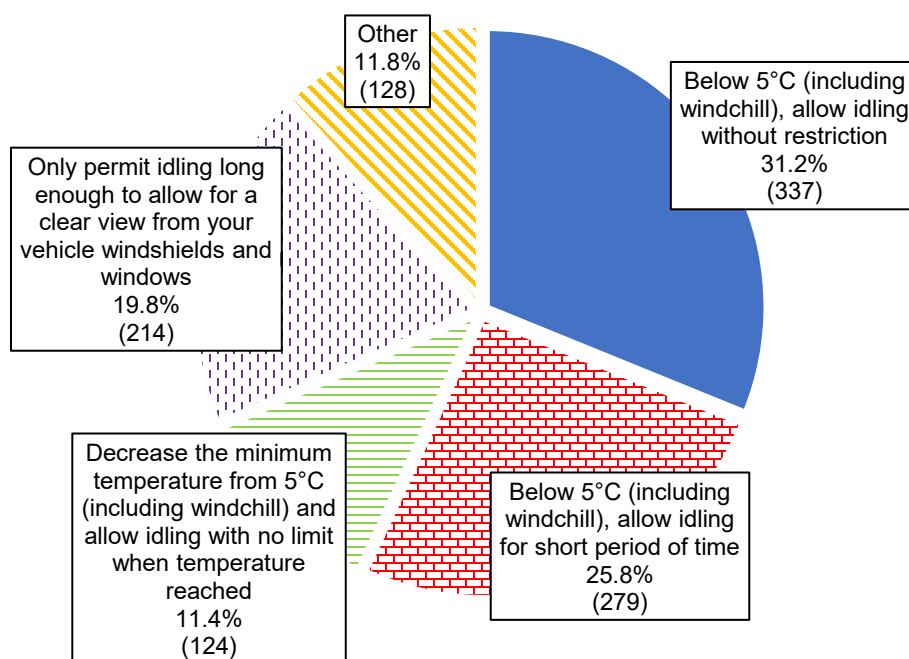
Figure 4. Above 27°C (including humidex), there is currently no maximum idling time limit. Indicate the option you agree with most.



The greatest percentage of respondents (42.4%) indicated that a maximum idling time limit should be applied when the temperature is greater than 27°C (including humidex), while 28.9% believed that the exemption should continue to permit unlimited idling. Some respondents (9.7%) indicated that the maximum temperature should be increased before permitting unlimited idling. The following represents the most common themes in the “other” category chosen by the remaining 19% of respondents:

- There is no reason to idle at this temperature – 57
- Set the maximum temperature lower than 27°C and allow unlimited idling – 39
- Set the maximum temperature higher than 27°C and allow idling for a short period of time – 36
- Permit unrestricted idling at this temperature – 33
- Permit exemptions at all temperatures for medical reasons – 9

Figure 5. Below 5°C (including windchill), there is currently no maximum idling time limit. Indicate the option you agree with most.



In contrast with the upper temperature limit, the greatest percentage of respondents (31.2%) indicated that when the temperature is below 5°C (including windchill), unlimited idling should remain permitted. Other results were as follows: 25.8% of respondents indicated that idling should only be permitted for a short period of time, and 19.8% indicated that idling should only be permitted as required to maintain a clear view from the vehicle windshields and windows. Finally, 11.4% of respondents indicated support to decrease the minimum temperature before permitting unlimited idling. Of the 11.8% who indicated the ‘other’ category, the following represents the most common themes:

- Permit unrestricted idling at this temperature – 51
- There is no reason to idle at this temperature – 18
- Set the minimum temperature lower than 5°C and allow idling for a short period of time – 15
- General support for the by-law – 11
- Set the minimum temperature higher than 5°C and allow unlimited idling – 6

3.6 Ottawa Disability Coalition and Accessibility Advisory Committee

Staff met with the Ottawa Disability Coalition and with representatives from the Blind community to discuss the existing by-law and to explore the impacts that potential changes may have to these communities. Feedback received from this engagement noted:

- A shorter maximum idling duration can benefit individuals with low vision, as the sound of engine idling can mask the sound of other traffic and create uncertainty for when it is safe to cross private accesses. Participants suggested that idling be considered from a noise perspective.
- Participants are unaware of the existing medical letter exemption and suggested expansion of the exemption to include letters from medical professionals beyond only medical doctors, and for the letter to apply to its carrier and not to any specific vehicle.

- Changes to the temperature exemption may have disproportionate impacts to these communities, and there are various medical reasons that make requiring a certain internal vehicle temperature important.
- Education is a key component to any changes made to the by-law.

Staff also consulted with the Accessibility Advisory Committee. Members provided general concurrence with the feedback received from the surveys and from the Ottawa Disability Coalition and suggested that staff consider:

- Exemptions for vehicles transporting groups of individuals where cold temperature may have a disproportionate impact to occupants.
- From whom the medical letter can be obtained, and how it can be verified to ensure its legitimacy.
- The benefits that improved air quality can have.

3.7 Industry survey results

Five industry surveys were distributed to gain a better understanding of why idling may be required for the business community and for existing vehicles currently exempted from the maximum idling time limit.

3.7.1 Business Survey

The business survey respondents were from the suburban and inner or outer urban areas (as defined by this [map](#)) and their businesses divided into the following categories:

- Retail – 2
- Not-For-Profit – 1
- Business Improvement Area (BIA) – 1
- Business support and supplies – 1

These businesses indicated that the primary reason for idling is to warm up a vehicle before driving or to keep the operator, passenger(s) or cargo warm or cool, and in particular perishable cargo. These results reflect those reported in the public survey.

3.7.2 Private Transit Vehicles Survey

The current exemption in the by-law is for private transit vehicles, defined as motor coaches, tour buses, and school buses, when passengers are embarking or disembarking.

From the 19 companies that responded, 18 indicated that idling is required to maintain internal temperature within a certain range for operator and passenger comfort, to ensure air brake pressure is at an appropriate level to resume travel, and to operate wheelchair lifts and digital and lighting systems.

3.7.3 Mobile Workshop Survey

The current exemption in the by-law applies to mobile workshops while in the course of being used for their basic function. Mobile workshops are defined as a vehicle containing equipment that must be operated in association with the vehicle or as a vehicle serving as a facility for taking measurements or making observations which is operated by or on behalf of a municipal utility or a police, fire, or ambulance service vehicle.

From seven respondents, the primary reasons for idling were to maintain internal temperature within a certain range for operator comfort, to warm up the vehicle prior to its use, to keep goods or materials at a certain temperature, and to use equipment that must be operated using the engine's power.

3.7.4 Normal Farm Practices Survey

The current exemption applies to vehicles engaged in a normal farm practice, which is defined as a practice that is conducted in a manner consistent with proper and acceptable customs and standards as established and followed by similar agricultural operations under similar circumstances and as a practice that makes use of innovative technology in a manner consistent with proper advanced farm management practices.

This current definition and the application of the current exemption are both consistent with the definition of a normal farm practice under the *Farming and Food Production Protection Act, 1998*, which legislates that no municipal by-law applies to restrict normal farm practices that are carried out as part of an agricultural operation.

Approximately half of the seven respondents indicated that idling is required for certain farm practices, primarily for mechanical purposes related to their farm equipment and for certain tasks like mixing feed, making deliveries, and drop-offs.

3.7.5 Armoured Vehicles Survey

The current exemption in the by-law applies to armoured vehicles where a person remains inside the vehicle while guarding the contents of the vehicle or while the vehicle is being loaded or unloaded.

The survey was provided to four armoured vehicle companies operating in Ottawa which all confirmed that idling is required in these situations, primarily for temperature control and ventilation as these vehicles are required to be fully sealed. These vehicles also operate security systems that must be in constant communication for safety reasons. Several companies indicated that they are exploring the introduction of anti-idling software and other methods to minimize their carbon footprint.

3.8 Schools

Ottawa's four school boards and private schools were invited to provide feedback on idling at or near schools. From 63 respondents, 33% indicated that idling is a concern, primarily from vehicles parking in areas in contravention of existing curbside parking regulations, and due to the lack of space at pick-up and drop-off times. Twenty-two percent of respondents indicated that vehicle idling is required for special transportation vehicles and for Kiss n' Ride programs. Suggestions for the by-law included additional enforcement and education, and the inclusion of additional signage to enforce the existing Traffic and Parking and Idling Control By-laws.

3.9 Suggestions for the by-law

All surveys asked respondents for their feedback and suggestions on the current by-law, and the following represents the most common themes:

- Not in support of a by-law – 164
- Further education and enforcement are required – 145
- In support of a by-law – 86
- Municipal vehicle idling – 40
- Discourage use of or ban drive-throughs – 15

- Consider installing idling signage or establishing idle free zones – 13
- Improve traffic flow – 9
- Consider exemptions for children, seniors, and pets – 9

3.10 Demographics

The following illustrates the demographics of respondents to the public survey that chose to self-identify:

- Indigenous peoples – 2
- Francophones – 32
- 2SLGBTQIA – 29
- Immigrant – 22
- Younger adult (29 years or younger) – 8
- Older adult (65 years or Older) – 58
- Person with disability – 23
- Person living in poverty – 7
- Racialized person – 10
- Other – 8

The following respondents self-identified as a:

- Man – 46
- Woman – 95
- Prefer not to answer – 3

The following respondents indicated their residence as:

- Downtown core – 197
- Inner or outer urban area – 367
- Rural area – 69
- Suburban area – 387
- Unsure/prefer not to answer – 11
- Do not reside in Ottawa – 8

4.0 Next Steps

Feedback received from the public and from industry will inform the development of staff's recommendations for potential by-law amendments. These will be included in the staff report to the Emergency Preparedness and Protective Services Committee and City Council for their consideration and approval in September 2024.

Updates on the review will be communicated to stakeholders through the [Engage Ottawa](#) website for this project.

Appendix A: Public Survey

1. Where do you currently reside in the City of Ottawa? Reference this [map](#) to help determine in which area you reside.
 - a. Downtown core
 - b. Inner or outer urban area
 - c. Rural area
 - d. Suburban area
 - e. I do not currently reside in Ottawa
 - f. Unsure / Prefer not to answer

2. Where do you most often see vehicles idling? Please select all that apply.
 - a. Airport or train stations
 - b. City of Ottawa facilities
 - c. Community or recreation centres, gyms, and play places
 - d. Construction sites
 - e. Drive-throughs
 - f. Driveways and private property
 - g. Medical offices, hospitals, long-term care homes
 - h. Near schools or daycares
 - i. OC Transpo Park & Ride locations
 - j. Shopping malls, plazas, grocery stores
 - k. Other (please specify)
 - l. I have not seen vehicles idling

3. If you have idled your vehicle in the last year, what were the reasons? Please select all that apply.
 - a. I expect to be stopped only for a short period of time
 - b. I forget to turn my vehicle off
 - c. I sometimes sleep in my car
 - d. It's too much trouble to turn my vehicle off and back on
 - e. I want to be ready to drive quickly if I need to
 - f. I work out of my car
 - g. To keep myself, others (including pets) and/or cargo in my vehicle cool
 - h. To keep myself, others (including pets) and/or cargo in my vehicle warm
 - i. To warm up my vehicle before driving
 - j. Other (please specify)
 - k. I have not idled my vehicle in the last year

4. According to [Ottawa Public Health](#), traffic emissions, including from idling vehicles, are a major contributor to air pollution related illnesses in Ottawa. Have you experienced or are currently experiencing health impacts due to poor air quality?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure / Prefer not to answer

5. The Idling Control By-law currently permits idling for up to 3 minutes every 60 minutes, and staff are reviewing this limit. According to [Natural Resources Canada](#), idling up to 1 minute is an appropriate amount

of time to warm-up your vehicle engine, a fuel saving measure and a break-even point to offset costs associated with restarting the vehicle.

Should the City of Ottawa consider reducing the limit for idling from 3 minutes to 1 minute?

- a. Yes. 1 minute is reasonable.
- b. No. 1 minute is not enough idling time.
- c. No. Keep idling at 3 minutes.
- d. Unsure

5a. Please indicate your reason(s) for supporting a 1-minute idling time limit.

5b. Please indicate your reason(s) for not supporting a 1-minute idling time limit.

6. The current Idling Control By-law presents scenarios or vehicles for which an idling time limit does not apply. Indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following exemptions:

Exemption	Agree	I do not agree or disagree	Disagree	I am not sure	I prefer not to say
Vehicles assisting in an emergency					
Mobile workshops					
For vehicle repair or servicing					
Armoured vehicles when guarding or loading contents					
Vehicles remaining motionless due to an emergency, traffic, weather, or mechanical difficulty					
Vehicles in a parade, race, or Council-authorized event					
Private transit vehicles when passengers are embarking or disembarking					
Vehicles transporting individuals with a medical certificate requiring a certain internal temperature					
Vehicles engaged in providing city services are subject to the City of Ottawa's Vehicle & Equipment Idling Policy					
Vehicles engaged in normal farm practices					
Vehicles that eliminate greenhouse gases during the idling phase					

7. The Idling Control By-law does not limit the time that you can idle when the exterior temperature is greater than 27°C (including humidex). During the summer when weather is hot, this means there is no time limit on idling in Ottawa.

This temperature regulation is under review. Which of these options do you agree with most:

- a. Above 27°C (including humidex), idling should be allowed without restriction.
 - b. Above 27°C (including humidex), idling should only be allowed for a short period of time.
 - c. Increase the maximum temperature from 27°C (including humidex) and allow idling with no time limit when that temperature is reached.
 - d. Other (please specify).
8. The Idling Control By-law does not limit idling when the exterior temperature is lower than 5°C (including windchill). During the winter when the weather is cold, this means there is no time limit on idling in Ottawa.

This temperature regulation is under review. Which of these options do you agree with most:

- a. Below 5°C (including windchill), idling should be allowed without restriction.
 - b. Below 5°C (including windchill), idling should only be allowed for a short period of time.
 - c. Decrease the minimum temperature from 5°C (including windchill) and allow idling without a time limit when that temperature is reached.
 - d. Only permit idling long enough to allow for a clear view from your vehicle windshield and windows.
 - e. Other (please specify).
9. If you have any additional comments or suggestions specifically related to the Idling Control By-law, please provide them here.