

Marblehead High School activists team with Sustainable Marblehead for anti-idling rally

By Greg Phipps

[@swampscott_rep](#)

Posted Jan 20, 2020 at 2:09 PM

Updated Jan 20, 2020 at 2:09 PM

Students refusing to sit idly by march on drivers waiting to pick up kids at school

Want more Marblehead news in your inbox? Sign up for our [newsletter](#)

Holding a picket sign that read “Exhaust is exhausting - stop idling,” Sustainable Marblehead co-founder Judith Black showed up at Marblehead High School sporting a determined look.

Black was joining forces with National Green Schools Society (NGSS) students at the high school on Tuesday, Jan. 14, to launch the first in a series of rallies aimed at promoting awareness about the negative environmental effects of idling vehicles.

“I really care about the environment and would love to see people caring more about this issue and working toward decreasing idling emissions and emissions in general,” said sophomore Claire Hoffman. “I’ve always loved the outdoors. I grew up in nature and I’d love to see this beautiful world preserved for other people to enjoy.”

The group congregated in front of the school right as classes were dismissed. They stood with signs and handed out information leaflets to drivers waiting to pick up their children. The leaflets asked drivers to “please” turn off their engines while waiting.

“Where do you start with what’s a very common problem?” asked Black just as the group formed outside the school. “Idling exacerbates and causes asthma, and ground level ozone is created by (the fumes). Because of their size, little kids are

closer to exhaust pipes so they're getting most of it. Outside of that, there are greenhouse gases to consider also."

Drivers' wallets can also suffer consequences. Idling for more than five minutes is illegal in Massachusetts and can result in fines of \$100 for a first offense and \$500 for each one after that.

Black said she would like to eventually see almost no one driving to the school and electrical buses being used to transport students.

"That would help heal the idling and congestion issues," she said. "It's going to be a long road but that's where we're going."

Junior Sophie Hauck, the senior project coordinator for the Marblehead High School chapter of the NGSS, said the idling project is one of several local environmental activities the group is involved in.

"Judith saw a need to bring attention to the idling issue at the high school, so we began organizing this project by asking our student members who were interested in focusing on the idling initiative," she explained. "In particular we're looking to find different ways for students to interact with the issue of climate change and the environment."

Hauck said the NGSS is planning to establish a visible presence in order to spread a community-wide message about not only the hazards of idling but overall environmentalism.

"We've been meeting over the course of the past month or two coming up with ways we can best communicate with adults about why this issue is important to us and why they should just turn (their cars) off," she said.

For the other participating students, the rallies are all about boosting environmental awareness in the community.

Junior Luca Scola's concern and eventual decision to take a more active role began when he realized "we don't have much time to fix the problems with the climate and the environment." Fellow junior Mae Genovese talked about her father being a marine biologist and doing research in Antarctica.

“He always emphasized the importance of saving the environment, and seeing his research inspired me to become active,” she pointed out. “I think it’s important that this new generation is educated about what we can do to save the environment.”

“As the next generation we’re responsible for our environment, and stopping cars from idling is part of that,” added Mae’s younger sister Summer, a freshman.

Setting an example, high school English teacher and NGSS advisor Connor Ryan rides his bike to school every day. He hopes, in time, this type of behavior will become less uncommon and more the standard.

“I’d like to think that I’m young enough to regard (riding my bike) as no longer optional behavior,” he said. “Whether it’s composting, recycling or turning off your engine, I think a lot of adults still view those behaviors as environmentally-based. The goal I guess is to get society to view them as necessary daily practice and behaving responsibly in an environmental fashion.”

In preparing for the launch rally, Black said the group surveyed the idling situation at the school for three days. Another survey will commence to determine what impact the three weeks of rallies have had on drivers’ behavior, she said.