

## ***Instant fines for idling drivers 'would send message about pollution'***

Drivers who repeatedly leave their car engine running while parked could be given instant fines under **proposals being considered by the government to give councils stronger powers** to tackle pollution from idling vehicles.

Michael Gove, the environment secretary, is supporting Westminster city council's call to be given the power to fine drivers without warning if they have previously been caught with an idling engine.

At present officers issue a fine if the driver ignores a warning and continues to idle for at least a minute. The fine is £20 or £80 depending on which regulations the authority uses to enforce the law.

The Times Clean Air for All campaign is calling for a new Clean Air Act and other specific measures, including a traffic ban outside schools at drop-off and pick-up times and a ban on new petrol and diesel cars by 2030.

Councils that enforce action against idling say that leaving an engine running when not in motion causes unnecessary pollution. An idling engine can produce higher exhaust emissions than one in motion.

Many local authorities, including the City of London, Camden, Croydon, Reading, Norwich and Canterbury did not issue any fines for idling last year.

Westminster city council carries out far more enforcement than most other authorities but issued only 20 fines last year. Nickie Aiken, the council's Conservative leader, wants the power to issue fines immediately to repeat offenders. She said: "Fines are our last resort but when we establish a pattern of persistent idling we need to be able to send a message."

Ms Aiken said that fines for company vehicles, such as supermarket delivery vans, that were caught idling needed to be "a four-figure sum to be a sufficient deterrent".

Mr Gove said that instant fines for repeat offenders should be considered as a solution to the problem. It was important to ensure that the new powers would be used proportionately by councils, he added.

Camden council, which wants to be able to issue instant fines, has warned more than 400 drivers but issued no fines since giving enforcement officers the power to issue fixed penalties in March last year. Adam Harrison, Camden's cabinet member for environment, said that it would be necessary to observe drivers idling for a specified period but that they should not be given a warning before they were fined. "While engagement [with the driver] is useful it is not going to cause everybody to change their behaviour in the way that getting a fine might," he said. Giving councils this power would send "a very clear message that drivers across the land would hear," he added.

Jonathan Grigg, professor of paediatric respiratory medicine at Queen Mary University of London and a founding member of the campaign group Doctors Against Diesel, said that councils should be able to issue automatic fines for idling for more than 30 seconds or a minute outside schools, GP surgeries and other places where vulnerable people were exposed to air pollution. "The days of warning people are over, we need to move to more standard enforcement," he said. "There will be howls of outrage but as soon as people know they are going to be fined they will be much more careful."

He said that drivers should be offered the chance to avoid the fine by going on an air pollution awareness course instead of paying a fine, similar to the system of speed awareness courses.

The Department for Transport said: "We are determined to reduce the damaging environmental impacts of drivers who keep their engines running while stationary, especially those in school zones. This is why we are making guidance for local authorities clearer, so that they know how and when to target drivers falling foul of the law. We will be polling local authorities to understand how any potential review of these powers may look in the future."