

Study Guide for *Idle Threat*

Companion to the
Documentary film,
Idle Threat

Idle Threat

Study guide will describe

- Essence of the film
- Why it was made
- How it was made – the contents
- Essence of Activism
- Essence of Eco Activism
- Questions to inspire critical thinking

Idle Threat

Essence of the film

- Since 1971 The City of New York has had laws restricting curbside engine idling of internal combustion engines.
- George Pakenham, determined to reduce air pollution in his neighborhood and combat global climate change, confronted the city's lax enforcement efforts by enforcing the 1971 law himself.
- The film chronicles the challenges, triumphs, friendships, and adversaries from his 5 year personal campaign

Getting Started

Why the film was made?

- After our invasion of Iraq, George Pakenham, a 30 year resident of New York City, really thought about our use and cost of oil and fuel. He became acutely aware of the senseless waste when he saw idling cars in his neighborhood.
- George thought, “Why are we at war for oil? Why are NYers just wasting fuel, running their engines going nowhere, sitting still at curbside?”
- He felt he had to do something.

Science - Idling Data Collection

- Pakenham noticed rampant idling behavior in his neighborhood but needed a record keeping system to track his observations and encounters.
- He developed a spreadsheet to track years of idling data and driver responses to his requests to shut off idling engines.
- Data showed George was 80% successful in having strangers shut off engines ... drivers in rough and tumble NYC. George was never accosted by drivers.

Finding Allies - Environmental Defense Fund

Pakenham needed an ally

- He went to several groups who specialize in air quality issues - non-profits, government groups, but most weren't focusing on the idling issue.
- George didn't give up. He kept knocking on doors and calling until he found Environmental Defense Fund (EDF).
- EDF had begun work on the idling issue and collaborated with George. EDF's goal was to get enforcement increased which would help reduce unnecessary idling.

Enhancing the Science

EDF: Study and Findings

- EDF used idling and transportation data in a model developed by M.J. Bradley & Associates, LLC.
- George and EDF researched the negative environmental and health impacts from idling.

TABLE 1. Idling in New York City – What are the environmental & health impacts?

	Daily ³²	Annually ²⁴
NOx emitted (forms smog)	4 tons	940 tons
PM emitted (soot)	192 pounds	24 tons
VOC emitted (forms smog)	9 tons	2,200 tons
Carbon monoxide emitted	25 tons	6,400 tons
CO₂ emitted	510 tons	130,000 tons
Area of new trees needed to absorb CO₂ emitted	-	20,000 acres =23 Central Parks
Number of cars CO₂ emissions equivalent to	-	18,000 cars

Health Science



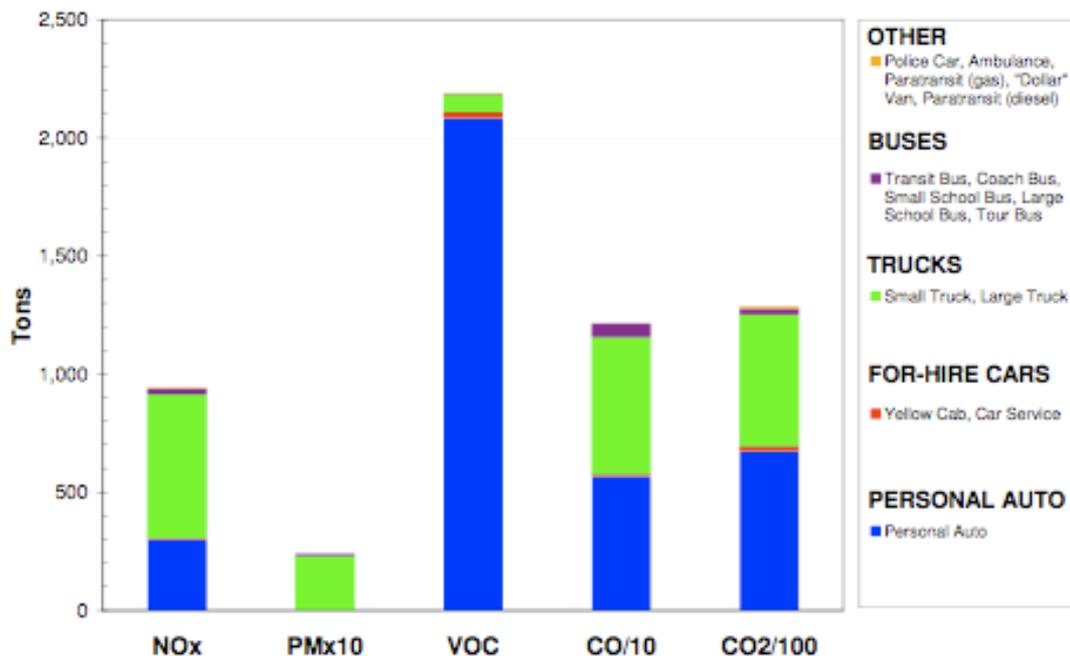
- Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and nitrogen oxides (NOx) creates smog (ozone) dries out lungs, triggers asthma, and is bad for health.
- Particulate matter (PM), often called soot, can be very, very small and get deep into the lungs and brain where it can result in heart problems, stroke, even lower IQ scores.
- Idling in NYC creates 940 tons of smog, 2,200 tons of VOCs, 24 tons of PM, and 6,400 tons of carbon monoxide each year.
- The pollution from idling is equivalent to driving 9 million large trucks across the city, from the Bronx all the way south to Staten Island every year.

Climate Science

- Carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases cause climate change. NYC idling results in 130,000 tons of CO₂ emissions each year, the equivalent of taking 18,000 cars off the road annually.

FIGURE 1

Current ANNUAL Emissions from Idling Vehicles in New York City



Economic Impacts

Idling in New York City:

- Wastes more than 7 million gallons of gasoline and 5 million gallons of diesel each year
- Costs drivers \$28 million in fuel costs annually

TABLE 2. Idling in New York City – What are the costs?

	Average weekday	Annually
Time spent	347,000 hours	87 million hours
Gasoline wasted	30,000 gallons	7.5 million gallons
Diesel wasted	20,000 gallons	5.2 million gallons
	Average weekday	Annually
Money wasted		
Total:	\$213,000	\$28 million
Per car:	-	\$44
Per truck:	-	\$392
Distance a car could drive using gasoline wasted	686,000 miles =28 trips around the world	171 million miles =722 trips to the moon and back

Solutions

- Enforce anti-idling laws. Allowing traffic enforcement agents (TEAs) to write tickets, having support from precinct commanders, increasing signage, and increasing awareness are all important parts of enforcement.
- Target neglectful drivers - trucks and individual drivers based on NYC data.
- Communicate impacts to the public with a public service campaign.
- Work with fleet managers and drivers to advance use of the best anti-idling practices and technologies, e.g. auxiliary power units (APUs), auto shutoff.
- Improve financing mechanisms for advancing anti-idling approaches and technologies, e.g. truck stop electrification (TSEs) stations

NYC Mayor's Office

Once the study was completed,

- EDF and other groups pressured City Hall and City Council to ponder the issue and pass legislation.
- In Feb 2009, bills were signed by Michael Bloomberg, then Mayor to:
 1. *Limit idling in schools zones to one minute*
 2. *Allow Sanitation and parks officers to write tickets*
 3. *Require taxi and limo test to have ' idling' in the examination for a license*

Red Tape

NYC Avoids the central issue

- Though laws were passed, City Council refused to force NYPD to require that **'traffic agents'**, write idling tickets....even in light of the fact that it could raise millions if not billions in revenue.
- The law passed in 2009 was merely lip service.
- Ticket issuance for idling has decreased each year since 2009.

Overview of George's Quest

Pakenham's Time Line

- 2004 became aware of war for oil
- 2005 began to notice idling drivers in NYC
- 2005 first encounter asking as driver to **'turn it off'**
- 2006 by encountering an undercover cop, learned there was a law in 1971 limiting idling to 3 minutes
- Sept, 2006, began documenting encounters with spreadsheet
- Jan 2007 Did a 12 minute 'demo' to a documentary film with a dozen encounters

George's Story Continued

- July 2007 - met with Environmental Defense Fund and shared data and video;
- 2008 - Idling become a topic at City Council meetings
- February 2008 - Mayor Bloomberg's signs bills into law
- February 2009 - “**Idling gets you Nowhere**’ published by EDF
- May 2009 - Media blitz New Yorker Magazine, CBS TV, NPR... As explained in the film
- Sept 2011. Pakenham concludes 5 year study with 2964 encounters on the streets of New York.
- October 2012 World Premiere of **Idle Threat** at Woodstock Film Festival.

Turn it Off!

'Turn it Off' behavior would:

- Save drivers money
- Greatly reduce noxious emissions from an internal combustion engines
- Reduce our dependence on foreign oil (nearly 50% of our oil comes from abroad)
- Create a better environment for our children's future

Activism

What is Activism

- Various leaders over time have tried to change public percepts on major issues and willing to be jailed to fight a cause

Who are famous activists?

- **Gandhi** - non violent political change
- **ML King** - non violent racial equality and anti-war
- **Henry David Thoreau** – social justice and civil disobedience

All three men served time in jail.

Henry David Thoreau

Famous Quotes

- If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.
- What you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals.

Mahatma Gandhi

Famous Quotes

- There is a higher court than courts of justice and that is the court of conscience. It supercedes all other courts.
- A 'No' uttered from the deepest conviction is better than a 'Yes' merely uttered to please, or worse, to avoid trouble.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Famous Quotes

- Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.
- The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education..
- ○ An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.

Eco Activism

What is Eco Activism and who leads it

- The awakening of the public to the facts which indicate that mans industrial revolution and carbon based behavior is modifying the planet to make it less inhabitable, less secure

Leaders

- Rachel Carson - Published Silent Spring – 1962
- Bill McKibben - Founder 350.org - public speaker/professor
- Tim DeChristopher subject of documentary film Bidder 70 -
- Peter Byck - documentary film maker -Carbon Nation

Personal Impact

What's in it for you?

At a root level, just don't idle your car engine. Tell your friends, family, enemies (*they will become your friends*)

You will typically save \$200 per year at current gas prices.

You will be asked "WHY" and you will tell passengers that it is their 'personal' way to abate climate change

It will lead you, your friends and family to a great awareness of climate issues

Study Guide Questions

Questions for Students

- Do you know what carbon footprint is?
- Do you pay for your gas or electric bill?
- Do you know what a hybrid car is and how it affects the emissions of CO₂?
- Do you know what an internal combustion engine is?
- What would happen if you kept the engine on in a garage and closed the garage door?
- Do you know why there is more CO₂ measured in the atmosphere in from October – April each year- world wide?
- Would you be willing to have our country wage war to influence global petroleum markets?

Study Guide Q2

- Can you equate 'second hand smoke' to the emission of CO₂ from the tailpipe of a car?
- Can you equate wearing a seat belt in a car to shutting off the car engine...while parked –but idling?
- If you saw your friend idling his engine, would you be ashamed or afraid to say something?
- Is there an issue in your particular community, apart from engine idling, which you **KNOW** is bad for the environment and your conscience says 'speak up'?
- Do you think the environment will be cleaner or less clean 20 years from now?
- Do you believe in climate change (global warming) and will it ever affect your future?
- Will your children live in a future which is free of fear of climate change?