ENVIRONMENTAL
Standards Scotland
Ìrean Àrainneachdail na h-Alba

News Release
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ESS welcomes Scottish Government draft Improvement Plan following investigation into engine idling

Environmental Standards Scotland (ESS) will today provide evidence to the Climate Action Committee on the Scottish Government's draft Improvement Plan on engine idling - where the engine is left running on a vehicle while it is stationary.

In June 2026, ESS exercised its statutory powers by laying an Improvement Report before the Scottish Parliament, requiring the Scottish Government to set out how it will make the legal framework on engine idling more effective. Scottish Ministers have now responded to that report by laying a draft Improvement Plan before the Scottish Parliament for approval.

Today at the Climate Action Committee, ESS will welcome the draft plan and emphasise the importance of action to ensure environmental law is effective and fit for purpose.

Mark Roberts, Chief Executive of ESS, said: "Part of our job is to ensure environmental laws are effective and deliver their intended outcomes.

"Engine idling is an avoidable source of air pollution, but the current legal framework may not provide a strong enough deterrent. We therefore welcome the Scottish Government's draft Improvement Plan, which we see as a positive step towards taking action to ensure the law is effective and achieves what it was designed to do."

Engine idling releases harmful pollutants into the atmosphere such as nitrogen oxides and particulate matter which are linked to serious health issues including respiratory and heart disease, long-term illness and premature death.
Outdoor air pollution is estimated to cause between 1,800 - 2,700 deaths each year in Scotland. Research shows that leaving the engine on in a stationary vehicle for even a short period of time – for as little as 30 seconds - can produce more pollution than turning the engine off and restarting the vehicle.

The Scottish Government's draft plan sets out its intention to review the level of the fixed penalty notice (FPN) for engine idling, with a view to increasing it. It will consult on the proposed level of the FPN next year and, should a decision be made to change it following that consultation, the government will then consult on regulations to amend the level as set out in the Road Traffic (Vehicle Emissions) (Fixed Penalty) (Scotland) Regulations 2003.

ESS took the decision to investigate the effectiveness of the 2003 Regulations after it received a representation from an environmental charity that raised concerns about the regulations' statutory guidance, the extent to which local authorities are enforcing the regulations and whether the current FPN acts as an effective deterrent.

ENDS

Notes to editors

i) You can read ESS' letter of response on the Scottish Government's draft Improvement Plan here.

ii) You can read the Scottish Government's draft Improvement Plan here.

iii) In June 2026, ESS laid an Improvement Report before the Scottish Parliament calling on the Scottish Government to take action to ensure the law on engine idling is effective and delivers its intended outcomes. The Scottish Government responded by laying a draft Improvement Plan before the Parliament in November 2026. The Climate Action Committee is now considering the draft plan and has until 13

December 2026 to make a formal recommendation to the Parliament on whether it should be approved. The Scottish Government will publish its final Improvement Plan following approval by the Scottish Parliament.

iv) In Scotland, the level of the FPN for engine idling has remained unchanged for more than 20 years and is lower than fixed penalties for other activities causing environmental harm, including fly-tipping, selling or supplying single-use vapes and littering. The penalty level has not kept pace with wider developments across the UK and European Union, while the cost of administering an FPN in Scotland is greater than the value of the penalty itself.

v) For more information, please contact press@environmentalstandards.scot