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Scottish Government
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Sent by email to: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

CC:

Stephen Flynn MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport
Stuart McMillan MSP, Convener, Climate Action Committee

24 September 2026

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Re: Reviewing the enforcement of engine idling law

We are writing to follow up on our [letter dated 11 March 2025](#), signed by our coalition of over thirty environmental organisations, community groups, councillors, and public health experts, which requested a review of the enforcement of engine idling law.

The letter outlined our concerns regarding the lack of enforcement of Scotland's engine idling ban, highlighting how inadequate guidance and low penalties have prevented effective deterrence. This has allowed idling to continue unchecked, and has aggravated levels of dangerous air pollution - most keenly felt in high-risk locations such as schools and hospitals.

We asked you to consider:

- Increasing fines from £20 to £80 to ensure effective deterrence
- Amending statutory guidance to improve enforcement
- Re-establishing a reporting duty on local authorities to increase transparency.



In your [response dated 3 June 2025](#), you indicated that the Scottish Government was reviewing the 2003 guidance *Local Authority Powers to Require Drivers to Switch Off Engines When Parked*, but declined our request to increase the £20 fixed penalty notice (FPN) on the grounds that ‘the vast majority of idling drivers switch off their engines when requested.’

While welcoming the new *Vehicle Idling Guidance for Local Authorities* (published 5 March 2026), which removes references to using FPNs only as a ‘last resort’ and broadens the scope of who is authorised to enforce the ban, we are concerned that it continues to refer to FPNs as discretionary and remains weak on transparency, with no mandatory requirements for councils to disclose a record of idling enforcement activity.

Following a representation submitted by the Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland (ERCS), we welcome Environmental Standards Scotland’s (ESS) investigation into the effectiveness of Scotland’s engine idling regime and their subsequent [Improvement Report](#), which endorses our concerns and backs our calls for stronger enforcement.

ESS acknowledged that the updated guidance provides greater clarity to local authorities, but concluded that Scotland’s existing enforcement regime remains unfit for purpose and fails to act as a deterrent. Significantly, ESS agreed with our recommendation to review and increase the £20 fine, which is well below the rate for equivalent offences such as the £100 fine for pavement parking, and has not increased with inflation since it was introduced more than twenty years ago:

‘The current £20 FPN level, which has remained unchanged for more than twenty years, risks no longer functioning as an effective deterrent. In some cases it acts as a disincentive to enforcement because administrative costs exceed the value of the fine.’ (Environmental Standards Scotland 2026: 3)

ESS also identified that ‘local authorities are not recording or reporting on idling enforcement activity in a consistent or comparable way, undermining transparency and national oversight.’ ESS indicate that they will issue a one-off request to all local authorities requiring them to provide annual data on engine idling offences and associated enforcement activity.

While welcome, this should be a routine mandatory reporting requirement to ensure transparency and accountability. It was only through Freedom of Information requests that ERCS obtained data exposing the widespread lack of enforcement by local authorities (see our [briefing](#)).

The 2026 Programme for Government states that the Scottish Government will:

‘Respond to Environmental Standards Scotland’s Improvement Report which recommends an increase to fines for vehicle idling and, subject to Parliamentary approval, consult on this change.’ (Programme for Government 2026: 38)



The Scottish Government is now required to submit an Improvement Plan to Parliament setting out what measures it will take in response to ESS's recommendations. **We urge you to take this opportunity to fully implement our original proposals:**

- **Increase fines:** Amend Regulation 8(b) of The Road Traffic (Vehicle Emissions) (Fixed Penalty) (Scotland) Regulations 2003 to increase the level of fines from £20 to £80 to effectively deter engine idling.
- **Enforce fines:** Amend *Vehicle Idling Guidance for Local Authorities* to encourage local authorities to issue fines as the first point of enforcing the engine idling ban.
- **Transparent reporting:** Re-establish a duty on local authorities to report engine idling enforcement activities to government, as set out in the 2003 guidance, to ensure accountability on the effectiveness and enforcement of the ban.

Despite public outrage at the health and environmental impacts of engine idling, this behaviour continues to be normalised and committed without fear of sanction – in marked contrast to other driving offences. These straightforward but transformational changes would give local authorities the effective tools to end avoidable pollution and protect our health and the environment.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Jill Belch, Co-Chair, Royal College of Physicians Edinburgh, Air Quality Working Group

Gareth Brown, Policy & Public Affairs Manager (Scotland), Asthma + Lung UK

Cheryl Burnett, Chair, National Parents Forum Scotland

Mike Corbett, National Official, NASUWT: The Teachers' Union

Emily Donnelly, Senior Transport Campaigner, Friends of the Earth Scotland

Dr. Shivali Fifield, Chief Officer, Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland

Cllr Stephen Jenkins, Convener for the Transport and Environment Committee, City of Edinburgh Council

David Kelly, Scotland Director and Head of Policy & Campaigns, Community Transport Association

Claire Larkin, CEO, Parents For Future Scotland

Cllr Angus Millar, Convener for Climate, Glasgow Green Deal, Transport and City Centre Recovery, Glasgow City Council

Dr. Lesley Morrison, Medact Scotland

Dr. Heather Price, UKRI Regional Clean Air Champion for Scotland and Associate Professor in Environmental Geography, University of Stirling

Rachael Revesz, Living Streets Edinburgh