May 31,2002

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

STATE ENCOURAGES BUS DRIVERS TO "TURN IT OFF!"

(AUGUSTA)-Riding the bus is an extremely safe way to go to and from school. Now, State education and environmental officials want to further protect student health when those buses are stopped.

Cutting school bus idling time is good for the air and good for the health of children and drivers alike. It also saves school budget dollars.

That's the gist of a message from Education Commissioner J. Duke Albanese and Martha Kirkpatrick, commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection.

Turning the engine off when loading and unloading passages reduces diesel exhaust emissions. These fumes can concentrate at ground level and enter the passenger compartments of the buses, as well as the buildings through open doors and windows.

Scientific studies indicate that prolonged exposure to diesel exhaust can cause respiratory problems such as asthma, bronchitis and lung damage. Children are more susceptible because their lungs aren't fully developed and they have higher respiration rates. Limiting idling times whenever possible can reduce the potential exposure.

The commissioners pointed out that such efforts help improve air quality, reduce health risks, and even save money. Further, avoiding unnecessary idling saves fuel, reduces engine wear and tear and helps reduce transportation operating costs.

Albanese and Kirkpatrick encouraged local school administrators to talk with transportation staff about ways to reduce pollution from buses. Their joint message, referred to as Informational Letter #81, was sent to 169 school superintendents, approximately 90 private schools, the State Board of Education, the Maine School Management Association, and Maine Municipal Association.

Approximately 175,000 students are transported on buses each day.

For more information, contact Lynne Cayting at the Maine Department of Environmental Protection at (207) 287-7599 or Harvey Boatman at the Maine Department of Education at (207) 624-6884.

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