

Earth-Friendly Fleet Management Practices

Vehicle Maintenance Can Help Reduce Fuel Consumption

HOLLIS ALLEN | Enterprise Fleet Management

Wild fluctuations in fuel prices and ongoing evidence of global warming are making everyone more aware of the need to be more concerned about the environment. For businesses that want to demonstrate their company's commitment to improving the environment, one option is to acquire hybrids and flexible fuel vehicles. But, the reality is that every business with a fleet of vehicles can actually help the environment just by performing regular vehicle maintenance, practicing sensible driving habits, and replacing vehicles at appropriate intervals to take advantage of more fuel efficient technologies.

Often, some of the simplest things can make a significant difference. For example, by reexamining routes, it could be possible to save a few gallons of gasoline every week. This can add up to a substantial savings at the end of the year when multiplied by the number of vehicles in a company's fleet. This was demonstrated recently by United Parcel Service (UPS), which announced that the company had significantly reduced fuel consumption by reducing idling time with routes that minimized the number of left turns a driver has to make. In addition, UPS trained its drivers to always turn off their engines

when they stop for a delivery, never idling at the curb or in a driveway, even for just a few seconds.

Paying more attention to proper vehicle maintenance also can help reduce fuel consumption. This not only means maintaining recommended tire pressure, checking wheel alignment and having regular oil changes. It also means avoiding the temptation to overload a truck, which can result in poor performance, expensive repairs and frequent downtime in addition to less fuel efficiency.

Maintenance issues that can have a significant effect on fuel consumption include the following:

- *Keep tires properly inflated.* Under-inflated tires create more rolling resistance on the road, which decreases fuel mileage and shortens tire life due to accelerated wear. Since tire pressure changes with temperature, you should check and adjust pressure when the tire is cold and when the vehicle has been sitting for a couple hours. Because information printed on the tire's sidewall may not be the optimum pressure for your vehicle or driving situation, the most accurate places to find out about proper tire pressure is on a label inside the driver's door or in your vehicle's owner manual.
- *Check wheel alignment periodically.* Misalignment can be caused by hitting potholes, curbs and bumps, worn steering or suspension components and deterioration from aging of suspension parts. Not only does misalignment increase rolling resistance and reduce fuel efficiency, it also

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causes additional wear and tear on tires. Wheel alignment should be checked every 12,000 miles or once a year, whichever comes first.

- *Select the right oil for your engine.* Using the correct viscosity oil is important because higher viscosity oils create greater resistance to the moving parts of the engine and require more gas. Changing oil every 3,000 to 5,000 miles not only is a good maintenance policy, but it is also good for fuel efficiency. Extended oil change intervals cause engine sludge, which also decreases efficiency and fuel mileage.
- *Adjust driving style to save gas.* Smooth, steady acceleration from a stoplight or stop sign uses fuel more efficiently than quick "jack rabbit" starts. Drivers also can increase fuel efficiency by shifting to higher gears at the lowest practical speed for standard transmission and accelerating gently with an automatic transmission. If vehicles are equipped with overdrive and/or cruise control, these should be used when appropriate. Also, making sudden starts and stops, revving the engine and excessive idling significantly lowers gas mileage. And, according to a United States government Web site, www.fueleconomy.gov, "each 5 mph you drive over 60 mph is like paying an additional \$0.15 per gallon for gas."
- *Remove excess weight.* Using roof-mounted racks and keeping unnecessary items in your vehicle, especially heavy ones, increases rolling resistance. The U.S. government estimates that an extra 100 pounds in your vehicle can reduce your mpg by as much as 2 percent, based on the percentage of extra weight relative to the vehicle's weight, which affects smaller vehicles more than larger ones. A good rule of thumb is, when possible, to carry large items inside the trunk or vehicle, and remove items when you don't need to carry them.

Replacing older, less fuel efficient vehicles at appropriate intervals also can impact the environment. Knowing when to dispose of older vehicles, a systematic process known in the

fleet management industry as "cycling," depends on many factors, such as the time of year, mileage, vehicle type, age and maintenance issues. A cycling program not only ensures vehicles are always in the best possible condition, it helps a company achieve optimum performance and the best resale value, which also directly affects cost savings. ■

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(ASE) technicians to serve the fleet maintenance needs of businesses with mid-size fleets. With 57 fully staffed offices nationwide, Enterprise Fleet Management supplies most makes and models of cars, light and medium duty trucks and service vehicles to businesses across the United States. In addition to supporting a comprehensive set of environmental initiatives that includes helping customers purchase verifiable greenhouse gas emission offsets, Enterprise pledges to match a portion of each customer's greenhouse gas offset purchases up to a total match of \$1 million. Enterprise has been recognized with the Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) "Blue Seal of Excellence" award for 11 consecutive years, an industry record. For more information, visit the company's Web site at www.enterprise-fleet.com or call toll free 1-877-23-FLEET.

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