

Greening our Fleets

Action Item #8 from the Mayors' Climate Agreement: "Increase the average fuel efficiency of municipal fleet vehicles; reduce the number of vehicles; launch an employees education program including anti-idling messages; convert diesel vehicles to bio-diesel"

Exciting things are happening in the world of fuel-efficiency, as people are realizing the serious political and environmental consequences of burning fossil fuels. Where businesses and institutions own a number of vehicles – a fleet – the financial value of fuel-efficiency is also quickly becoming apparent. As a result, both private and public fleets are greening all over the country. It's not that this is a new idea – Denver first enacted an executive order to "green" its city fleet of vehicles in 1993, a full *fourteen years ago*. But since then, a steady stream of cities, counties, schools, businesses, and state governments have developed programs to make their vehicles as fuel efficient and non-polluting as possible.

So what does it mean to "green the fleet"? Once again, it's all about efficiency. The Green Fleets website offers the following suggestions, which are useful whether you are a city, business, school, or individual:

1. Downsize vehicles - use the smallest effective vehicle for a job. Don't use a sedan when a more efficient sub-compact, or even scooter, could do the job. For individuals – consider a smaller car, rather than an SUV or van, for local errands.
2. Optimize Vehicle Use – minimize and combine business trips. At home, group your errands, or try shopping with a friend.
3. Incorporate Efficiency into Bid Specifications – specify a minimum fuel efficiency for vehicles. Do a little research on what's available, and decide on the fuel efficiency you want before shopping for your next car, whether for your business or home.
4. Maximize Efficiency – regular maintenance, such as oil changes and tire inflation, increases fuel efficiency. Tire inflation alone can increase efficiency by 3%. Educate employees about not idling vehicle engines; if idling for more than about 15 seconds, it's more fuel efficient to shut off the engine.
5. Eliminate Fleet Vehicles – could a golf cart or bike be used instead of that extra car? Could your family locate close to one person's job, or bus line, to eliminate the need for another car?
6. Buy Vehicles that run on Alternative Fuels – A few options are compressed natural gas, liquid natural gas, propane, or bio-diesel. These are mostly used in larger trucks and buses, however, diesel cars also get good gas mileage and can use bio-diesel.
7. Use Transit, Bike, Walk, or Telecommute – how many vehicle trips can be eliminated?
8. Go with Electric Drive – hybrid vehicles, which use electricity and gas or hydrogen fuel cells, are the wave of the future. Hybrids are still the most fuel efficient and flexible vehicles out there – particularly if you are looking for a sedan or SUV (where are those mini-vans?!).

So what are others doing? Here are a few examples:

Last month, UPS deployed 50 new hybrid electric delivery vans (to add to their 20,000 other fuel-efficient vehicles). According to Robert Hall, director of UPS Ground Fleet Engineering,

they expect "...a 45% increase in fuel economy in addition to a dramatic decrease in vehicle emissions."

In Charlotte, North Carolina, fleet managers expect to recover the extra cost of their new hybrids through fuel and maintenance savings within 2.5 to 5.5 years.

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority has replaced 414 diesel buses with compressed natural gas buses. The new buses release 25% less greenhouse emissions, and help to reduce smog in the Washington D.C. area.

Clean School Bus USA is a public/private partnership to reduce the pollution emitted by school buses. They achieve their goals through encouraging the elimination of unnecessary school bus idling, the retrofit of existing buses with improved emission controls or alternative fuels, and replacement of the most polluting buses with new, cleaner models.

There are many ways to "green the fleet," from simple behavioral change and tune-ups, to retrofits and new purchases of alternative vehicles. Certainly gas prices are only likely to go up over the long run, so greening makes good fiscal sense. So what can we do? What about the City's new patrol cars – can they be highly fuel-efficient? Maybe the school districts could reduce their fuel expenses, and the fumes our kids breathe, by retrofitting the buses and enacting a no-idling policy, if they haven't already. Perhaps your business needs a new company car or delivery vehicle, or the family wagon has driven its last lap, and you could consider a hybrid or alternative fuel vehicle (this is the step our family needs to take). Let's check out the options for greening our fleets. It's good for people, good for the earth, and good for the bottom line. So why not?

Check it out:

Buying an Eco-Friendly Car: <http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/Story?id=1718746&page=1>

EPA's Green Vehicle Guide: <http://www.epa.gov/greenvehicle/index.htm>

U.S. Government Fuel economy site, with green vehicle options: <http://www.fueleconomy.gov/>

National Clean Diesel Campaign, with links for Clean School Bus Campaign, and grants for retrofiting: <http://www.epa.gov/otaq/diesel/index.htm>

International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives Green Fleets website:

http://www.greenfleets.org/greenfleets_us.html

Info brochure: http://www.greenfleets.org/Green_Your_Fleet.pdf

Seattle's "Clean and Green Fleet" Action Plan:

<http://www.cityofseattle.net/environment/Documents/CleanGreenFleetAP.pdf>

PHH Arval – a firm that assists Fortune 500 companies in fleet-greening:

<http://www.phharval.com/index.html>