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Ten Ways to Cut Fuel Costs—offers good insights and practical recommendations

Ten Ways to Cut Fuel Costs

By Jack Lee, CEO, 4Refuel

Remember the good old days, when gas was less than a buck and prices at the pumps stayed the same for weeks? Well, the good old days are gone forever. Today, we live in a world where fuel prices seem to go up by the hour, and pundits speculate on living with oil prices running up to \$200 per barrel.

As consumers, many of us have adjusted our lifestyles. We try to drive less. Some have chosen to car pool, while others get rid of their gas guzzlers and opt for more fuel-efficient vehicles, including hybrids.

For companies, the good old days meant fuel up and go. Little attention was paid to managing fuel. But the price of oil continues to rise, cutting deeper than ever into profits and causing owners and managers to adopt a new fuel consciousness. Fuel management is a necessity.

You can't control the price of fuel, but you can control your fuel consumption. The answer is fuel management.

Any company can improve their fuel efficiencies. It takes work and commitment from the head office to your people on the road and at the job sites. More and more companies are making changes in their operating practices to cut costs now and to be prepared for even higher costs in the future. To help you adjust, here are 10 ways to cut fuel costs:

1. Train and educate your drivers. It starts with those who have their foot on the gas pedal. Your drivers can control fuel consumption each time they fire up their engines, and proper training can improve fuel efficiency, economy and emissions. Hard acceleration, speeding and idling are the biggest causes of fuel waste. Initiate a training course for drivers and reward participation.
2. Decrease idling. Be aware of the time engines idle. No longer can we leave machinery and equipment running all day long. Stop your engines! Excessive idling adds to your fuel costs by as much as 50 percent and can shorten the life of engine oil by 75 percent, adding more costs. Initiate a campaign to reduce idling time and reward participants. Allowing an engine to idle more than three minutes causes expensive damage which harms efficiency, shortens engine life and increases maintenance costs. It all adds up.
3. Start off slower. This is another lesson your drivers must be taught. Jackrabbit starts waste fuel and save less than three minutes per hour driving, but can result in using 40 percent more fuel and increase toxic emissions by 400 percent! What's the rush? Ease up on the gas pedal and your efficiencies will improve.

4. Slow down. Speeding is dangerous. It wastes fuel and creates higher levels of toxic emissions. Speeds over 65 miles per hour drastically impact fuel efficiencies—cars travelling at 75 miles per hour use 20 percent more fuel. Trucks travelling at 75 miles per hour use 50 percent more fuel and emit 100 percent more carbon monoxide, 50 percent more hydrocarbons and 31 percent more nitrogen oxides.

5. Lose weight. Excess weight places unnecessary strain on your vehicle's engine and greatly affects its fuel efficiency. By removing as little as 100 pounds, you can significantly improve your gas mileage. Check each vehicle and pitch out that unnecessary weight!

6. Use a fuel management system. This is the most powerful way to lower fuel costs and increase productivity. Available systems range from basic onsite refueling (which saves up to 20 minutes in wasted time and fuel each day, per vehicle) to automated fuel tracking (which details every gallon pumped into every vehicle by date, time, quantity and fuel type) to telematics (which measures overall fuel efficiency, vehicle performance, tracks fuel waste due to idling, speeding, etc. and identifies critical areas to improve efficiency and reduce fuel costs and emissions.) The technology exists so you can become a fuel manager and stay on top of your fuel consumption, one vehicle at a time. It can work for you.

7. Upgrade your fleet. Whenever possible, invest in modern, fuel-efficient vehicles. Modern diesel engines are far more fuel-efficient and perform better with modern diesel fuels such as ultra-low sulphur diesel and biodiesel. Though it may seem expensive, new diesel vehicles can save thousands of dollars in maintenance, fuel and productivity per vehicle. Measure each piece of equipment for fuel efficiency and get rid of the bad ones! Replace and upgrade your equipment regularly. It may hurt now but it will pay you back.

8. Tune up vehicles regularly. Do you have a stringent, well-managed maintenance policy? Many companies "fix it when it breaks." This attitude costs too much in wasted fuel. A well-maintained vehicle performs better, improves fuel efficiency, reduces toxic emissions and, in the long run, will cost less to maintain.

9. Pump it up. Proper tire inflation improves gas mileage. At 4Refuel, our statistics show improperly inflated tires can cost up to two weeks worth of fuel per year! How big is your fleet? Two weeks per year per vehicle adds up to thousands of dollars in lost profits! In addition, proper inflation results in improved vehicle and braking performance, and increases tire life.

10. Implement advanced mobile asset management technology. Wow, that's a mouthful! You can measure and manage your fleet better when you have the right information. Tracking miles traveled, average speed and engine efficiency is critical to cutting fuel costs. This information will help your drivers and managers optimize routes with better planning. Mapping software and GPS will eliminate thousands of unnecessary miles per week. Less time on the road means less fuel consumed, less wear on vehicles, decreased expenditures and overall increased productivity, plus lower toxic emissions!

Once you have made a total commitment to managing your fuel better and changing some of your bad fuel habits, results will follow. Stick with it. Fuel prices are only going up.