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## **Service for Sustainability**

By Erik Gaspar, Enterprise Fleet Management

Often, some of the simplest things can make a significant difference. This is true when it comes to helping the environment. In fact, every business with a fleet of vehicles can 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.

For example, simply reexamining and changing routes could 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.

Paying more attention to proper vehicle maintenance also can help reduce fuel consumption. This not only means performing preventative maintenance at the recommended intervals and using the correct fluids but also maintaining your vehicles' recommended tire pressure, checking wheel alignment and keeping the air and fuel filters clean. It also means avoiding the temptation to overload a truck, which can result in poor performance and decreased fuel efficiency along with the possibility of expensive repairs and frequent downtime.

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 place 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 causes additional wear and tear on tires. Wheel alignment should be checked every 12,000 miles or once a year, whichever comes first or if you notice unusual tire wear.
- 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 can actually reduce fuel efficiency. Manufacturers have, in some cases, increased the service intervals for their vehicles to help reduce their carbon footprint. This not only decreases the cost of maintaining them but reduces the amount of crude oil needed and the amount of waste oil produced. Changing your vehicles' engine oil at the manufacturers recommended intervals is not only a good maintenance policy, but it is also good for fuel efficiency.

- Adjust driving style to save gas. Smooth, steady acceleration from a stoplight or stop sign uses fuel more efficiently than quick “jackrabbit” 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 lower gas mileage. And, according to a United States government Web site, [www.fueleconomy.gov](http://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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Erik Gaspar, Account Executive for Enterprise Fleet Management in Boston, can be reached at 781-937-6363. He is supported by an experienced team of veteran mechanics and accredited Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) technicians to serve the fleet maintenance needs of businesses with mid-size fleets. In addition to maintenance management programs, Enterprise’s services include vehicle acquisition, fuel management and insurance programs, as well as vehicle registration, reporting and remarketing. Visit the company’s web site at [www.efleets.com](http://www.efleets.com) or call toll free 1-877-23-FLEET.