Fleet Drivers and Fuel-Smart Driving
Introduction

This guide is part of the fleet greenhouse gas management initiative of Environmental Defense Fund. This comprehensive initiative helps organizations improve vehicle fleet efficiency, reduce operating costs and cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Several factors impact a fleet's operating costs and greenhouse gas emissions, including vehicle selection, vehicle maintenance, and driver behavior. This brief guide focuses on one of these factors: driver behavior. Here you will find recommendations, tips, and resources for developing a customized driver education program that encourages and rewards fuel-efficient driving behaviors. Fleet benefits include:

- Better fuel economy;
- Improvements in driving safety;
- Lower maintenance costs from less vehicle wear and tear; and
- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions.
Focus Your Efforts

Dozens of factors can affect fuel efficiency, but not all of these factors are completely under the control of drivers (e.g., the amount of cargo carried). Furthermore, many factors that drivers can control have only a modest impact on vehicle fuel economy (e.g., using a car shade in warm climates). Social science research suggests that asking people to make a limited number of straightforward changes can be more effective in changing behavior than overwhelming them with a large number of requests.

For this reason, successful driver education programs should focus on a few factors that: 1) drivers can substantially control; 2) have the most impact on fuel economy.

In the figure below, idling, vehicle maintenance, acceleration, and use of air conditioning are factors that drivers have the most control over and have the highest impact on fuel usage. While we believe these factors are fairly representative of a typical vehicle fleet, your organization may position the same factors somewhat differently – and you may introduce other factors unique to your business.
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Generally speaking, the following behavioral tips tend to be both high-impact in terms of fuel economy and substantially under the control of drivers:

- **Minimize idling.** Idling for more than 10 seconds uses more gas and emits more global warming pollution than restarting your car.

- **Avoid aggressive driving behaviors.** Obey speed limits, accelerate gradually, and anticipate stops.

- **Keep your vehicle in good shape.** Vehicles are probably on maintenance schedules and drivers may already receive frequent and regular reminders. However, there may be specific maintenance actions that drivers can perform, such as ensuring proper tire pressure, and having a vehicle serviced at the earliest sign of trouble.

Fleet managers also play an important role in helping to maintain fuel-efficient driving behavior, particularly in regards to routing. Whenever possible, managers should adhere to pre-planned routes and avoid last minute route changes for most efficiency. Whatever your circumstances, we recommend that you focus your driver education efforts on the factors in your organization that have the most impact on fuel economy – and which drivers can directly control. With focus, you can be explicit about what driver behaviors you want to encourage, and what driver behaviors you want to discourage.

Additional tips for cutting vehicle emissions and fuel costs are available from www.fueleconomy.gov and other sources: see Page 7 of this handbook and Section VI for further information.
Set Goals

Once you’ve determined the behaviors you want to elicit, set goals for your driver education program. It’s OK for goals to be modest at first. For example, “to make all drivers aware of our top priority: minimizing idling, by the end of this fiscal year.” What’s important is that your goals be specific, measurable, and realistic.

Develop Core Program Messages

What, specifically, are you asking drivers to do? And how should they do it? The answers to these simple questions are your program’s core educational messages. The following tips can help you communicate these messages with maximum impact.

Tips for Developing Influential Program Messages

☐ Let drivers know that management has already bought into -- and adopted -- the desired behaviors. Management has a critical role to play in establishing and modeling behavioral norms within any organization: they should lead the way in adopting fuel efficient driving habits and behaviors.

☐ Don’t inadvertently send conflicting messages. Be mindful that drivers could perceive management appeals for more timely deliveries and/or improved driver productivity as conflicting with messages about fuel-efficient driving techniques. Set the record straight by directly addressing possible misperceptions upfront. Speeding and aggressive driving, for example, are inherently dangerous and are not acceptable ways to boost productivity.

☐ Connect fuel-efficient driving tips to your organization’s mission. For example, pharmaceutical companies are in the business of improving health and well-being. Similarly, reducing vehicle emissions contributes to cleaner air and a healthier, more productive population.

☐ Appeal to your drivers’ sense of citizenship and community. Connect desired behaviors to the greater good, protecting the environment, and making a difference. Because, “it’s the right thing to do.”

☐ Link fuel-efficient driving behaviors to accident prevention and personal safety. Spelling out the multiple benefits of desired behaviors will increase the saliency of your communications. Some drivers won’t slow down to save fuel, but they might slow down with a reminder that their personal safety is at stake.
Connect desired behaviors to the greater good, protecting the environment, and making a difference. Because, “it’s the right thing to do.”

- **Connect work driving habits to home and personal life.** Remind drivers that better driving habits will also reduce the cost of operating their personal vehicles. This reinforces the notion that everyone – not just the employer – stands to benefit from behavior changes. “Drive home” the point by offering tangible savings estimates. For example, “Gentle acceleration and braking can also help cut your family’s fuel spend by about $20 per month, according to the EPA.”

- **When possible, recognize drivers who set a good example.** Allow individual drivers to share their personal tips on how to reduce idling, cargo loads, etc., in your fleet communications. A good way to recognize drivers who already display the desired driving behaviors may be to have them partner with management in launching a driver education program within your organization.

- **Broadcast organizational successes widely and frequently.** Acknowledging progress towards program goals motivates your best drivers to sustain desired behaviors, helps all drivers feel like they are part of something bigger than themselves, and can even help persuade laggards to get on board.

- **Repeat driver tips frequently, but change up the messaging.** Everyone needs reminders, but it helps to keep your communications fresh and current. Inject a bit of humor to avoid becoming tiresome or being perceived as intrusive.

- **Use seasonal “hooks” to keep tips fresh and relevant for drivers.** For example, remind drivers that reducing vehicle idling is a small gift to the environment during the holidays. As winter approaches, tips on winterizing vehicles should include checking tire pressure to account for the change in temperature. An impending snow storm provides an opportunity to remind drivers that slowing down prevents
accidents and saves fuel. Remind drivers how to use air conditioning efficiently around July 4th, because saving fuel reduces our dependence on foreign oil.

☐ Offer supporting facts from credible sources and real-life examples to which drivers can relate. For example, “You can assume that each 5 mph you drive over 60 mph is like paying an additional $0.24 per gallon for gas,” according to EPA.”

☐ Keep messages short and sweet. Drivers are busy. Make your points succinctly.

☐ Avoid sounding parental. As one driver put it, “Please, don’t act like this is a tenth-grade driving class.”

☐ Consider asking drivers for a personal, public commitment in the form of a non-binding pledge or a personal goal. Research demonstrates that people are more likely to act in ways that are consistent with their commitments.

Deliver Program Messages with Maximum Effect

How you communicate with your drivers is just as important as what you communicate. The following tips can help you deliver information about your program more effectively.

Utilize Credible Sources

☐ When delivering program messages, utilize credible sources from the perspective of your drivers. For example, if there is an undercurrent of driver mistrust of executive management, have program communications (driving tips, etc.) come from your fleet manager, your fleet management services provider, another credible “third-party”, or even an exemplary driver within your fleet.

☐ Designate a respected driver or front-line manager as the primary program contact and liaison between fleet drivers and managers. People inevitably have questions and concerns about any new program. Providing a single, trustworthy point of contact can boost your program’s credibility. It can also help you identify unanticipated problems early on, thus facilitating corrective actions.

☐ When presenting facts, include the source. Facts from credible, third-party sources are more likely to influence behavior. For instance, “Today’s automobile does not need a warm-up period before driving it. Even on the coldest morning, running your engine for 30 seconds is all you need before your vehicle is ready to drive, according to J.D. Power.”
Put Existing Communication Channels to Work for You

Pardon the pun, but don’t reinvent the wheel. Communicate with drivers through channels that they already utilize, rather than adding new, separate lines of communication. This increases the likelihood that your messages will be received, and lends credibility to a new initiative.

- **Launch your program via an in-person group meeting.** If at all possible, launch your program in person and in a group setting, such as an annual meeting, safety seminar, or regional sales meeting. This helps convey the importance of your initiative, and that the entire organization is behind it. At a minimum, launch your program via a special announcement from senior management or other credible leaders within your organization.

- **Use your intranet site** to deliver driver education messages. For instance:
  a. Have managers and/or exemplary, peer-respected drivers periodically report on how their driving habits have changed – and the implications -- via a brief blog post.
  b. Regularly post tips, reminders, ideas, and interesting relevant facts in a place where drivers will easily see them. The following websites can provide you with ideas:
     i. www.fueleconomy.gov
     ii. www.ecodrivingusa.com
     iii. www.cartalk.com
     iv. www.edf.org
Leverage existing online or phone-based fleet management tools. For example:

a. Post “driving tip of the day (or month)” messages on websites where drivers enter mileage and other reports.
b. Similarly, drivers who phone in mileage reports or a contact fleet services number for maintenance issues can receive a brief “tip of the day” via the “on-hold” message.

Piggy-back on regular electronic news letters, emails, or mailings. Add driving tips, recognize outstanding drivers, offer driver testimonials, and highlight program successes via your existing news letters and email blasts. You can also take advantage of employee communications by adding inserts to payroll & benefits notices, new employee communications, new vehicle paperwork, etc.

Provide drivers with visual prompts. Visual reminders displayed in vehicles – on the sun visor or in cargo areas, for instance -- keep key program messages front and center. Take care to place them where they won’t be a distraction while operating the vehicle.

5 Measure, Monitor, and Offer Meaningful Incentives

For best results, your driver education program should employ measurement, monitoring, and meaningful incentives. Measuring the impact of driver behavior on fuel economy allows you to set goals and demonstrate results, and ongoing monitoring helps maintain driver interest and attention. Lastly, even small incentives can have a dramatic impact on behavior. A series of realistic and achievable rewards will generate excitement for the program and increase the speed with which drivers adopt desired behaviors.

Measure Your Drivers’ Fuel Efficiency

In most fleets, miles per gallon (MPG) can be used as a metric for tracking fuel efficiency, and existing fleet management services may already be capable of reporting this information for individual vehicles and/or drivers. Ask your fuel card or fleet fuel management service provider about supplying you with periodic, vehicle or driver-level MPG reports.

Monitor for Improvement on an Ongoing Basis

Quarterly, bi-annual, or annual measurement should have sufficient resolution to reflect changes in driver fuel economy. (Data quality may be problematic at shorter intervals.). Ensure that drivers are clear on what is being measured and how often, and offer them...
opportunities to provide you with feedback. It is important that drivers believe that program metrics and reporting intervals are fundamentally fair.

Consider developing a monitoring program that has drivers competing against their own past MPG performance, instead of competing against each other. This allows you to see improvements in driver behavior, and won’t discourage drivers from sharing tips with their colleagues. Direct driver-to-driver MPG comparisons may be not pass the fairness test, due to the effects of different routes, schedules, vehicles, weather, and other factors on fuel economy.

**Tips for Creating Meaningful Incentives**

Remember that the financial benefits of saving fuel accrue to the company, not the driver. Consequently, sharing even just a little of the savings with the people who generate them – your drivers – can have an enormously positive impact on program results.

- Incentives need to be meaningful enough to influence drivers, but not so substantial as to incite gaming. (If you offer an all-expenses paid vacation in Hawaii, for instance, don’t be surprised to learn that drivers are “improving” their MPGs by filling up vehicle tanks on their own dime!)

- The actual rewards you offer should reflect your drivers’ preferences and your organization’s culture. You may want to offer incentives that help improve “life on the road,” or you may prefer incentives that drivers can enjoy when they are off duty. Cash rewards, retail and restaurant gift certificates, even a free oil change for personal vehicles can motivate drivers to participate.
Find a way to reward ALL drivers who achieve and sustain significant results. If you reward only a few star performers, you can inadvertently take away everyone else's motivation to participate, and discourage drivers from sharing their best eco-driving tips.

Keep things fun and interesting. In addition to rewarding all drivers who appreciably improve their fuel economy, consider offering special recognition or small prizes for a few standouts every quarter.

Further Reading

For information on selecting fuel efficient vehicles, visit www.edf.org/greenfleet and select the 2nd step in the Five-Step Green Fleet Framework. There you will find links to a number of helpful websites on the subject.

To set and track progress towards fleet emissions goals, check out Environmental Defense Fund’s Fleet Greenhouse Emissions Calculator at http://www.edf.org/fleetcalculator

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