

Improving Your Gas Mileage

Avoid pain at the pump with these tips

Better gas mileage can save money and reduce greenhouse emissions

Just as Closter motorists are planning their routes to summer destinations, gas prices have climbed to record highs. To help soften the blow, the town's Environmental Commission, offers some tips for spending less time and money at the pump while reducing greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming.

Observe speed limits

Most people would be surprised how much gas they could save just by making really simple changes. For example, you can save up to 23% on your fuel costs just by observing the speed limit. Gas mileage for most vehicles decreases quickly at speeds over 60 mph.

Don't idle

Idling is another gas gobbler that uses more fuel than stopping and restarting the engine, especially if the wait will be longer than 10 seconds, according to NJ Environmental Federation. And the larger the engine, the more fuel is wasted while idling. Exhaust-related air pollution from idling cars and diesel vehicles also puts people at increased risk for asthma attacks, allergies and other respiratory ailments, and contributes to heart problems and higher cancer rates in high traffic areas.

Lose weight

It pays to take unnecessary items out of the car trunk. An extra 100 pounds can cut your gas mileage by up to 2 percent. The smaller the car, the greater the impact of extra cargo weight on fuel efficiency.

Be good to your car

Routine auto maintenance can improve fuel efficiency greatly. For example, replacing a faulty oxygen sensor can improve mileage by up to 40 percent. Replacing a clogged air filter can boost fuel efficiency as much as 10 percent. Keeping the engine properly tuned, filling tires to dealer-recommended pressure levels and using the correct grade of motor oil can also add up to substantial fuel savings.

Drive smart

Sensible driving habits can make a world of difference in fuel efficiency, according to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). To improve mileage by as much as 33 percent:

- Avoid rapid acceleration and sudden braking;
- Use cruise control to keep your car at a constant, moderate speed;
- Use overdrive gear whenever possible if you have automatic transmission;
- Avoid peak traffic hours;
- Instead of using the air conditioner, open the vents whenever possible.

Perhaps the best way to lengthen the time between fill-ups at the pump is to simply drive less. Warm summer weather brings more opportunities for walking and biking instead of climbing into the car. Use mass transit or tour buses to get around the cities you visit on vacation. When running Saturday errands or going out for an evening with friends, consider carpooling.

Of course, if you're considering replacing your car, it just makes sense to choose the most fuel efficient model for your needs. It will not only save you money but help reduce air pollution so everyone can breathe a little bit cleaner air. New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection publishes a "Clean Vehicle List" on its web site to help car buyers make informed decisions at <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/cleanvehicles/>.

For more information about improving gas mileage and reducing carbon emissions from vehicles, visit the US EPA's web site at www.epa.gov/otaq/consumer/17-tips.pdf. A list of ways to enjoy a more sustainable life, home and community is available on ANJEC's web site at www.anjec.org/pdfs/GoingGreen.pdf. ANJEC is a statewide nonprofit organization that supports local environmental commissions and municipal officials in their efforts to protect the environment and preserve natural resources in their community.

References:

US Department of Energy and EPA Fuel Economy site: www.fueleconomy.gov

US EPA "Tips to Save Gas and Improve Mileage:" www.epa.gov/otaq/consumer/17-tips.pdf

NJDEP Clean Vehicle List: <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/cleanvehicles/>

ANJEC Sustainability Communities Guide: http://anjec.org/html/tools_sustainable.htm

June 2008