Tips can help conserve fuel

By Jason Krumholz
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"Sure, I'm for saving the planet, getting better fuel economy, and solving the oil shortage, but it's the holiday season, work is demanding, and who's got the time or money?" Does this sound familiar?

Most people care about our environment, but sometimes these concerns get lost in the hustle and bustle of our daily lives. There's good news, though: It's easy to use less gas and increase your fuel economy and, with gas still over $2 per gallon, you might even save some money!

- Coast into red lights rather than accelerating and braking. Cars use more gas from 0 to 5 mph than from 5 to 35 mph. You'll save on brake wear, too!
- Plan your day to avoid extra miles. Know what errands need to get run and figure out the shortest route. If your family has multiple cars, let the person who's driving the most use the most efficient car.
- Remove ice, snow and unnecessary weight. Ice and snow on your car may be a pain to remove, but leaving it on disrupts air flow over your car and adds weight. Pulling the beach umbrella out of your trunk might not be a bad idea either. One hundred pounds of extra weight will cause a noticeable reduction in gas mileage.
- If you use an automatic starter or warm up your car before getting in, consider shortening the amount of time your car runs before you drive. One minute of idling is enough to warm up most cars. Five minutes of idling per day translates to several gallons over the course of the winter.
- Check tire pressure every time you fill up, especially in the winter when temperatures change rapidly. Even slightly under-inflated tires wear out faster and can reduce gas mileage by 6 percent. Most gas stations have a gauge for customer use, or they can be purchased for under $10.
- Consider using a reusable air filter. Filters from companies like K&N are available for most vehicles. They are only slightly more expensive than standard filters, will not void your car's factory warranty and never require replacement, so you save money (and landfill space) in the long run. The best part is that a clean air filter can increase fuel efficiency up to 10 percent.
- Consider switching to synthetic motor oil. Synthetic oil changes cost about $60, but synthetic oil only needs to be changed every 7,000 to 10,000 miles. In the long run, the cost is about the same and it will save you time. Plus, you'll get 2 percent to 8 percent better fuel mileage, and less used oil will need to be disposed of.
- Thinking about a new or newer car but don't feel like a Toyota Prius is really your style? That's OK. Most newer cars, and even some SUVs carry an EPA certified ultra low or low emissions vehicle rating (ULEV or LEV). Ask your dealer about this, and be sure to buy a car with at least a LEV rating, as they release half as many pollutants as a car without this rating. Some new cars are available in PZEV models which reduce emissions by 98 percent.

One or two miles per gallon, or a few less miles per day may not seem like much of a difference, but the average two-car family would save $377 per year by increasing fuel mileage by 1 mpg and reducing miles by 10 percent. If every Rhode Islander did this, we'd save over 75 million gallons of gas per year. If every car in America were 1 mpg more efficient, that translates to nine billion (yes, billion) gallons of crude oil conserved per year!

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