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Tornado E-Alert

Surviving the Drive

By Michael Schaffer

Just recently oil prices are doing something consumers have not seen in months: they are not increasing daily and in some markets, even coming down slightly. Although everyone -- including the world's economies -- is grateful for this, it is doubtful



that the price of oil will drop to the levels that were common just a few years ago. Demand has grown significantly around the world, a fact that is likely to impact the cost of oil and fuel for years to come.

These changes are impacting our industry significantly. Some manufacturers are adjusting their delivery charges to distributors as often as once a week depending on fuel

costs. Distributors are in a tough bind: some are trying to absorb a portion of the additional charges, while others simply have no choice but to pass on the added costs to their customers.

There are ways that drivers for both manufacturers and distributors can reduce the amount of fuel they use, a cost savings needed now more than ever. Some of these measures include:

- Making only right turns: Turning left on a busy street takes more time, causing drivers to use gas while idling. Some delivery companies have found they can reduce mileage, fuel usage, and costs considerably by planning their routes using GPS systems (global positioning systems) so that they make only right turns. This simple strategy has actually helped one delivery company shave nearly 30 million miles off its routes.
- Staying in the right lane: Staying in the right lane on freeways can also save fuel and time. If there is an accident or the traffic is unusually bottlenecked, drivers in the right lane may be able to quickly exit the freeway.

Using maps or a GPS system can help drivers find alternate routes if they do need to exit. Also, drivers should not rush to get back on the freeway. Instead, they should go further down the road to avoid other motorists who have also exited and are now eager to reenter the freeway.

- Avoid excessive idling: Some studies indicate drivers can save up to 19 percent in fuel usage if they simply turn off their engines whenever they have to stop for more than a minute.
- Use cruise control: This can be surprisingly beneficial. Using the cruise control function smoothes out the driver's accelerator input by eliminating "surging." Also, drivers using cruise control tend to take the long view of the road rather than reacting to every fast/slow change in the traffic around them.
- Slow down: We have all heard this many times before, but recent tests show that drivers can cut fuel use by as much as 14 percent if they slow down by approximately 10 miles per hour.

What Does Not Work

Searching for ways to save on fuel costs, manufacturers and distributors will likely consider other fuel-saving measures as well. But some of these measures simply do not reduce fuel use; others produce savings so minor that they are essentially insignificant. For instance, with older vehicles, using the air-conditioning may cause the engine to use more gasoline. But with newer models, the increased amount of gasoline used when the air-conditioning is engaged is often minimal. Additionally, opening the windows tends to increase drag on most cars, canceling out any measurable gain one might achieve by turning the air-conditioning off.

Some drivers have also tried adjusting their tire pressure as a way of reducing their fuel usage. Keeping tire pressure at recommended levels is important for safety and helps reduce tire wear, but some drivers are now raising the air pressure in their tires above recommended levels, believing this will help reduce fuel usage. Although some experts have said that this measure can indeed help to save fuel, studies indicate the savings is modest at best. Furthermore,

overinflating a vehicle's tires can decrease traction and make handling and braking more difficult.

Perhaps the best fuel-saving tip has more to do with a driver's state of mind than with any changes one might make. Moderate driving, as compared to more aggressive driving, saves fuel. How is this accomplished? Go light on the pedal. Take the long view of the road and brake easy. This approach alone can produce dramatic savings that can start adding up immediately.

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