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Increasing car's MPG lowers its impact on environment



"There are no two ways about it: Cars are not good for the environment. Emissions and gasoline consumption work side by side to endanger the public health and degrade the natural surroundings," writes Scarlet Tang of the Advocacy Institute. "For instance, automobiles are a major factor in causing ground-level ozone, which in relatively small amounts can impair lung function in healthy people as well as damage crops and other plants."

The environmental impact of a car or truck is directly related to its gas mileage, usually measured in miles per gallon. The better the MPG of a vehicle, the less damage it does. Other benefits of increasing the fuel efficiency of your car are reduced fuel costs, extended life of the car and decreased repair bills. The following information from The Gas Guzzler Campaign describes how to increase your car's MPG and decrease its environmental impact.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

When an engine is cold, it needs a higher ratio of gasoline to air to function. Using more gas means that you're causing more air pollution. A cold engine also causes more air pollution because the catalytic converter is cold. A catalytic converter reduces carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide and hydrocarbon emissions by burning these pollutants and converting them to carbon dioxide, water and nitrogen. Catalytic converters, however, require a hot engine to function properly. When the catalytic converter is cold, the car will emit essentially all its pollutants through the tailpipe.

When you start a cold car, here are some things to remember:

- Reduce the number of cold starts by planning ahead. Try to accomplish several errands in one trip.
 - Don't warm up your car by letting it idle. This will only increase wear and tear on your engine, as well as increase polluted emissions. The best way to warm up your car is to drive it.
 - Start driving slowly. Don't push your car too much in the first few minutes — accelerate gently, and don't go over 35 mph. This is the best way to warm up your car and get the motor oil circulating.
 - Obey speed limits. A car is generally most fuel-efficient when it's going between 35 and 45 mph, and its fuel economy declines rapidly after 45 mph. The average car uses 17 percent more gas when driven at 65 mph instead of 55 mph. It uses about 25 percent more at 70 mph.
 - Accelerate gently. Flooring the gas pedal can increase gas consumption by 50 percent, compared with a smooth acceleration. The same goes for decelerating. If you see a red light or a stop sign ahead, take your foot off the gas well in advance.
 - Don't idle your car. When your car is idling, your MPG is zero! If you have to stay in place for more than a minute, it will use less gas to just turn off the car and restart when you get going again, then to let it idle.
- Fuel-efficient driving behavior not only includes how you actually drive, but how you take care of your car. Here are some basic maintenance tips.
- Change your oil. Motor oil reduces

wear and tear on your engine by lubricating its moving parts. It also cools the engine parts, protects against rust and other corrosion, cleanses some parts and seals some surfaces. All of these things contribute to fuel economy.

- Tune up your car. A car that is regularly tuned up can use 10 percent less gasoline than a poorly maintained car. This translates into a drastically increased amount of emissions. EPA estimates that 50 percent of all emissions are caused by the 10 percent of cars that are badly maintained.
- Check your tires. Proper inflation of your tires can cut fuel use by 5 percent and extend the life of your tires. Five percent might not seem like much, but if you assume a national fleet of 172 million cars and trucks, traveling an average of 10,000 miles a year at an average of 18 MPG and wasting 5 percent of its gas, that's more than 4.75 million gallons of gasoline being wasted each year. At \$1.25 per gallon, that's \$6 billion we're wasting.

For more information on the development of fuel-efficient cars and how to improve your car's efficiency write: The Gas Guzzler Campaign, in care of The Advocacy Institute, 1730 Rhode Island Ave., N.W., Suit 600, Washington, D.C., 20036.

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