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HOW TO SAVE ON GASOLINE COSTS

BRENTWOOD, Tenn. – The cost of fuel may have dropped since its surge last year, but saving money on gasoline is always a top priority for consumers. While you may have no control over prices at the pump, the Tennessee Society of CPAs advises that there are steps you can take to be a smarter gas consumer.

Of course, the most obvious choice might be to consider a more fuel efficient vehicle if you're driving a gas guzzler. But if an auto purchase isn't on your current agenda, here are some tips that will lower your gas costs no matter what type of car you're driving.

MAINTAIN YOUR CAR PROPERLY

Your car will be more fuel efficient if you keep it in top running condition. That includes getting regular tune-ups to ensure the engine is working right, which can improve gas mileage by up to four percent, according to www.fueleconomy.gov, a Department of Energy Web site. Replacing a dirty air filter can enhance mileage by as much as 10 percent. Making sure that your tires are properly inflated can add up to 3.3 percent to your mileage. And, using the grade of motor oil that the manufacturer advises can give you a one percent to two percent boost in mileage. All of these small steps are worth taking because they can add up to big savings. Another benefit is that they will likely help lengthen the life of your car and minimize repair costs over time.

SLOW DOWN

Driving below the speed limit can definitely reduce your costs at the pump, as well as make your trip a little safer. In a *Consumer Reports* test, for example, dropping to 55 miles per

hour from 75 increased gas mileage by 33 percent. It's a good idea, too, to avoid rapid acceleration, numerous stops and starts and lengthy idling, since all of these will reduce gas mileage. If your car has cruise control, try using it to ensure a steadier pace at a reasonable speed.

LIGHTEN UP

The heavier your car, the higher your fuel costs will be. Many people use their cars as a kind of moving storage space, hauling around items they don't really need. Believe it or not, all that extra weight is costing you money. Removing an extra 100 pounds from the car can save you as much as 12 gallons of gas in a year, according to the Alliance to Save Energy. Once you have a clean trunk, use it instead to transport items you might have carried on your roof. The added weight and drag from carrying materials on your roof can cut gas mileage by five percent.

THINK TWICE ABOUT PREMIUM

Many experts recommend that regular unleaded gasoline is acceptable for most cars. If your engine shows signs of trouble with regular - such as knocking - then it is best to go back to premium. Otherwise, you can save a lot by switching from the premium grade.

CONSOLIDATE YOUR TRIPS

A little bit of planning can help save a lot of green when it comes to gas usage. Before you begin your day, consider where you need to be in the next few hours and try to figure out how to do it in as few trips as possible. That will not only lower your gas usage, it will also give you more free time.

About Money Management

Money Management is a weekly column on personal finance prepared and distributed by the Tennessee Society of Certified Public Accountants (TSCPA) as a part of its financial literacy initiative.

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