

#4 a gallon gasoline is tipping point for most consumers

by Kathleen Schmatz

Letter to the Editor:

If gasoline prices hit \$4 per gallon as many economists predict, an estimated 65 percent of American car owners say they will dramatically change their driving behavior, according to a survey conducted by Opinion Research Corporation for our association.

According to the survey, 91 percent of drivers are driving less and 75 percent are maintaining their vehicle better because of rising gas prices. Other specific behavioral changes were carpooling (31 percent), purchasing more fuel efficient vehicles (30 percent) and making greater use of public transportation (24 percent).

Driving less might not be an option for you, but performing simple and inexpensive vehicle maintenance will not only save gas money, perhaps as much as \$1200 per year, but will also improve your vehicle's safety and dependability. The Car Care Council offers these gas-savings maintenance and driving tips:

Check your vehicle gas cap. About 17 percent of the vehicles on the roads have gas caps that are either damaged, loose or are missing altogether, causing 147 million gallons of gas to vaporize every year.

When tires aren't inflated properly, it's like driving with the parking brake on, and can cost a mile or two per gallon.

A vehicle can have either four, six or eight spark plugs, which fire as many as three million times each 1,000 miles, resulting in a lot of heat, electrical and chemical erosion. A dirty spark plug causes misfiring, which wastes fuel. Spark plugs need to be replaced regularly.

An air filter that is clogged with dirt, dust and bugs chokes off the air and creates a "rich" mixture "too much gas being burned for the amount of air, which wastes gas and causes the engine to lose power. Replacing a clogged air filter can improve gas mileage by as much as 10 percent.

Keep your car properly tuned. A 21st Century tune-up can improve your gas mileage by an average of four percent. Fixing a serious maintenance problem, such as a faulty oxygen sensor, can improve your mileage by as much as 40 percent.

These simple vehicle maintenance steps can add up to serious savings.

Kathleen Schmatz

President & CEO

Automotive Aftermarket Industry Association (AAIA)

Bethesda, Maryland

301-654-6664

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