

Efficient Use of Your Vehicle

Efficient use of your car saves you money, reduces our dependence on oil, and reduces your impact on the environment. This handout provides information on how to utilize your vehicle efficiently, how to improve your miles per gallon (MPG), and how to reduce your environmental impact.

Smart Driving

1. **Avoid quick accelerations and heavy braking.** According to the EPA, aggressive driving can reduce gas mileage by up to 33%.
2. **Observe the speed limit.** Most vehicles begin to decrease in gas mileage at or before 60 miles per hour. Following the speed limit improves your fuel efficiency while improving your safety.
3. **Avoid unnecessary idling.** Turn the engine off when you are parked or waiting. An idled engine gets 0 mpg. Restarting your engine uses less fuel than idling.
4. **Reduce the load.** Heavy loads in your vehicle can decrease your MPG. The EPA estimates that an extra load of 100 lbs reduces MPG by up to 2%. Remove the extra stuff in you vehicle and unhook your trailer if its not being used.
5. **Reduce the racks.** Racks on your roof, unnecessary exterior sun visors, and other exterior additions to your vehicle may create unwanted wind resistance that can reduce your MPG. Remove bicycles and other items when not needed. Remove any racks or exterior attachments whenever possible.
6. **Cruise in Cruise Control.** Whenever driving on long stretches of highway, consider using your cruise control. By maintaining a consistent speed, you improve your MPG.
7. **Air Conditioning or Windows.** Using the air conditioning can significantly reduce MPG. But opening your windows at high speeds can also reduce MPG. In general, follow these simple recommendations:
 - a. When driving within the city, use your windows or air vents. Leave the AC off whenever possible.
 - b. When driving on the highway, first try using your air vents. If this is inadequate, use your AC on low or medium.



Vehicle Care

8. **Check your tires.** The EPA estimates that you can improve your MPG by up to 3.3% simply by keeping your tires properly inflated. Your vehicle manual will provide the recommended tire pressure. Check tire pressure regularly before driving for the day. Maintaining appropriate tire pressure also preserves the life of the tire, reducing the amount of discarded tires and the energy and resources required for production of new tires.
9. **Keep your vehicle tuned.** Follow the maintenance and care recommendations in the vehicle manual. Check air filters and replace if dirty. Dirty air filters can reduce MPG. Change your oil as recommend using the appropriate oil grade. Oil that indicates it is Energy Conserving on the American Petroleum Institute label can improve MPG.

Stop, Think, and Plan

10. **Leave your vehicle at home.** Try walking or bicycling. Research the community to find shops and programs that are close to your home.
11. **Use Public Transportation.** Oshkosh residents have access to an excellent transit system that connects all regions of the community. This program is low-cost, quick, and easily accessible. Visit the Oshkosh Transit page for more information: <http://www.ci.oshkosh.wi.us/Transit/Transit.htm>



12. **Plan your trip wisely.** Less driving saves you money and time while reducing the negative impact on our environment. Avoid heavy traffic areas and peak-traffic time when possible. Map out your route so as to eliminate unnecessary driving and reduce your route distance.

13. **Combine multiple tasks and trips into one.** According to the US Dept of Energy, “Several short trips taken from a cold start can use twice as much fuel as a longer multipurpose trip covering the same distance when the engine is warm.”
14. **Car Pool & RideShare.** Talk with your co-workers or classmates and see if riding together is an option. Check out the Wisconsin Dept of Transportation Rideshare page at <http://www.dot.wi.gov/travel/commuter/rs-index.htm>. Also read through our **Car Pool & RideShare** handout.
15. **Purchase a “Green” Vehicle.** Driving the most fuel-efficient vehicle can reduce your fuel usage significantly, saving you money. While this is not an option for everyone, the EPA has developed an excellent internet guide on how to “choose the cleanest and most fuel-efficient vehicle that meets your needs” at www.epa.gov/greenvehicles

Additional Government Links

- EPA’s Climate Change – On the Road: What Can You Do: <http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/wycd/road.html>
- US Dept of Energy – Factor’s Affecting Mileage: <http://www.fueleconomy.gov/feg/factors.shtml>
- US Dept of Energy – Gas Mileage Efficiency Tips: <http://www.fueleconomy.gov/FEG/drive.shtml>
- Federal Trade Commission – How to Improve Gas Mileage: <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/alerts/alt064.shtm>
- US Dept of Energy – All about your car: <http://www.energy.gov/yourcar.htm>
- US Dept of Energy – Rate Your Car: <http://www.fueleconomy.gov/feg/sbs.htm>
- EPA Green Vehicle Guide: www.epa.gov/greenvehicles

Efficient Use of Your Vehicle handout developed by Justin Mitchell, Sustainable Oshkosh Board member, January, 2009. Dashboard photo and Oshkosh Transit photo by Justin Mitchell.