



Greener Fleets

Six steps that will reduce the carbon footprint of your company's vehicles

1. Train your drivers

The best way to have a lasting impact on your fleet's green credentials is to make sure all vehicles are well driven. At its most basic, a decent driver training programme should reduce accidents. This will result in lower costs as well as being good for employee wellbeing and the company's health and safety record. Driver training should also lead to a fall in insurance premiums and lower repair bills.

Having to repair and replace cars and parts is bad for the environment, so there are immediate green benefits. But even more wins will come from training drivers how to use fuel efficiently. This includes reading the road ahead properly to improve decision making and avoiding sudden braking as well as showing the benefits of gentle acceleration.

2. Select the right vehicles

Social pressure and taxation are encouraging a move to smaller engines, and fleet managers are being encouraged to shrink fleets. Car designers and manufacturers have caught on and there is now a raft of interesting vehicles that meet emissions and fuel consumption targets in a range of interesting ways. Smaller, cleaner vehicles make more sense than ever. And more fleet lists are now limited to cars that meet strict emissions criteria.

With benefit-in-kind tax rates also reflecting these priorities, more employees are looking at these statistics rather than top speeds or 0-60mph times. But smaller cars aren't an option for drivers with lots of stuff or people to lug around. Some will need more decent boot and/or passenger space. Here there is more good news, as developments in petrol, diesel and hybrid engines, as well as greater use of hi-tech, lightweight materials throughout all cars, mean that even larger vehicles are now capable of better fuel efficiency and low emissions.

3. Maintain your vehicles

Vehicles that are properly serviced and well maintained do less damage to the environment. They are less likely to be involved in accidents, are much more fuel efficient and emit less pollution. Even simple things, such as keeping tyres at the right pressure, can have an impact on a vehicle's carbon footprint and running costs. Also, encouraging drivers to change vehicles regularly will bring results. Younger vehicles are generally better for the environment. One reason for this is that the importance placed on environmental issues by manufacturers means that newer engines and vehicles, assuming you stick with a similar engine size, type and model, are better for the environment than models they replace.

4. Measure and monitor

Keeping an eye on how green your fleet is requires constant monitoring of several factors but, above all, fuel consumption. If drivers are doing lots of business mileage you will probably be part of a fuel card scheme. This allows employers to keep tabs on who is filling up their vehicles and when. Most schemes provide reports on fuel usage and costs.

Even without using fuel cards, in car technology means it is easier for employers to keep an eye on mileage and fuel consumption. Experts in telematics and in vehicle technology say employers should increase efforts to reduce their fleet's carbon footprint. Current technology can monitor a vehicle's fuel consumption, MPG and CO2 output in real time. This kind of technology is leading the way in monitoring a fleet's carbon footprint.

5. Reduce your journeys

The best way to help the environment is to reduce mileage. And the easiest way to do that is to cut journeys. Making sure journeys are efficient helps, but ensuring they are necessary is better. A journey by van or car should be seen as a last resort. If an alternative is available, it should be explored.

This requires looking at all journeys across the whole business. Does everyone who commutes by car need to drive to work? Is it possible to share cars and journeys? Integrated travel plans, which aim to connect employee journeys across public and private transport, can help employers keep journeys to a minimum. Covering everything from car sharing, subsidised bike schemes, and online bus and train planners, such a scheme can be a powerful way to keep private vehicle journeys to a minimum.

There are now different ways to give employees access to cars when they need them, including car clubs and other car pooling schemes, such as Streetcar for Business, which offers to make cars available specifically for corporate clients.

6. Communicate from the top

Whatever companies do to make their fleets greener, initiatives have to fit within the broader corporate culture.

Encouraging a sustainable culture means everyone in the company has to be on board, and in particular that means the board. Nothing will cause resentment more than directors lecturing other drivers on their responsibilities while rocking up in a petrol guzzling monster. Senior staff must engage with issues such as monitoring their fuel consumption and taking part in driver training exercises. If the ambition is to cut fuel costs or accident rates, with environmental benefits of secondary importance, then be honest about it and focus communications on the appropriate elements of the programme.

If you really need to plug the car in...

No road tax, no London congestion charge and low running costs mean the potential savings from going electric are considerable, and several realistic family and fleet electrical cars will be on our streets soon.

That's why to welcome the rapid increase in electrical vehicles; Insure Green has teamed up with Towergate/Axa to offer special discounts of up to 10% to anyone who takes out motor insurance on an electrical vehicles.