

Cutting your company's carbon footprint - start with the cars

With the growing trend for companies to improve their Corporate Social Responsibility credentials, and pressure for everyone to reduce their carbon footprint, companies have started to look at how "green" their company vehicles really are. Here are six ways to reduce your company's effect on the climate.

1.) Make fewer journeys

The easiest way for a company to help the environment is to reduce the number of miles its company vehicles do, and to achieve that they must reduce the number of journeys made. Ensuring journeys are really necessary is a key factor, and every car journey should be seen as a last resort and avoided if at all possible. If a viable alternative is available it should be explored fully. In order for changes to be made business owners should look at every journey made by everyone in the business, and consider such issues as whether all staff who commute to work need to do so by car.

If they do, consider introducing a car sharing scheme. Consider setting up a company wide integrated travel plan, which would combine employee journeys across public and private transport, and help business owners keep journeys to a minimum. By introducing such a scheme, covering everything from car-sharing, subsidised cycles and online train and bus planning, a business owner can use it to prove to employees and external parties, that the company takes its Corporate Social Responsibility very seriously.

2.) Improve driver skills

One of the best ways of achieving a sustainable impact on your company vehicles green credentials is to make sure all vehicles are well driven. Driver training programmes are available and should reduce the number of accidents, and that should reduce costs, due to lower insurance premiums and repair bills, and improve the company's health and safety record, as well as being good for employee wellbeing. Replacing car parts is bad for the environment as greenhouse gasses are created by making them, so reducing this has immediate green benefits.

Even more benefits can come from training drivers to save fuel by driving more efficiently. This includes reading the road ahead properly to improve decision-making and avoiding sudden braking as well as the benefits of gentle acceleration. On-board computers can now show the driver the fuel consumption depending on their driving style, and further improvements come from better planning of journeys. In-house competitions amongst drivers are popular, and giving training and offering prizes for the most fuel efficient drivers can reduce the company fuel bill and reduce accidents.

3.) Gain top down commitment

Nothing will cause more resentment than directors lecturing other drivers on their responsibilities whilst driving a company vehicle with a huge engine and enormous emissions. Owners must engage with issues such as fuel consumption and take part driver training exercises themselves. Whatever companies do to make their vehicles greener, initiatives have to fit within the broader corporate culture and must get the buy in from the very top.

It will be most effective if this desire to reduce environmental impact matches other activities within the company. Encouraging a sustainable culture means everyone in the company must be on board, and in particular, that means the Board of Directors or owner.

4.) Measure progress

Keeping an eye on how green your company vehicles are requires constant monitoring of several factors particularly fuel consumption. If drivers are doing high business mileage, the company may well have a fuel card, which will allow business owners to track who is filling up and where, and has the benefit of reports on fuel usage and costs.

Even companies not using a fuel card can use the current technology within vehicles to monitor a vehicle's fuel consumption, MPG and CO2 output in real time. This kind of technology is leading the way in monitoring company vehicles carbon footprint.

5.) Keep vehicles serviced

Well maintained and serviced vehicles are proven to do less damage to the environment. They are less likely to be involved in accidents caused by failing parts, and are much more fuel efficient thus emitting fewer pollutants. Keeping the tyre pressures at the correct levels can have an impact on a vehicles carbon footprint and running costs, and regularly replacing vehicles will also bring benefits.

Because of the importance placed on environmental issues by manufacturers, assuming you keep a similar size and type of engine, newer models are better for the environment than those they replace. They will produce the same power but will be more fuel efficient and produce less harmful emissions.

6.) Choose the best vehicles

Social pressure and taxation are encouraging a move to smaller engines and businesses are reacting by having smaller vehicles. Designers and manufacturers have caught onto this and there are now plenty of interesting vehicles that meet emission and fuel targets. Smaller and cleaner vehicles make more sense now and are being looked at as a necessity not just something for green enthusiasts. More and more supplier fleet lists are now limited to vehicles that meet strict emissions criteria. With benefit-in-kind tax rates constantly increasing, more employees are looking at emissions and miles per gallon/litre statistics rather than a cars 0-60 times.

However, smaller cars are not suitable for drivers who constantly need to ferry large amounts of luggage or people about, and will need bigger boot and passenger compartment space. There has been progress in this area as well with developments in diesel, petrol and hybrid engines, as well as greater use of hi-tech, lightweight materials in vehicle manufacture, meaning even larger vehicles are now capable of better fuel efficiency and lower emissions.

REMEMBER!!

There has never been as much choice when it comes to green vehicles and as technology advances, this will increase further. Business owners of all size of company need to consider the cost implications of running vehicles and in the current climate, how they can reduce the costs of doing so.

All areas of the business must commit to a policy of reducing the company's carbon footprint, and owners should consider the benefits to their business of improving their Corporate Social Responsibility. It doesn't have to be a cost and the PR benefits should not be ignored at a time when image is everything.