Green Transport Partnership

A Glance at Clean Freight Strategies:

Driver Training and Monitoring

Most fleets can improve fuel economy by at least four percent through driver training and monitoring alone, saving more than $900 per truck each year in fuel costs.

What is the challenge?

Driving practices can have a large impact on truck fuel economy. Trained drivers can save fuel by limiting such practices as:

- excessive highway speed
- long periods of idling
- rapid acceleration
- improper shifting
- following circuitous routes

By changing driving habits like these, the American Trucking Associations estimates that well-trained truckers can improve fuel efficiency by up to 35 percent. Most fleets are likely to realize more modest improvements. Fleet managers have estimated that driver training and incentive programs typically result in 15 percent fuel savings. Two trucking fleets in Canada documented the impact of driver training and found fuel efficiency improvements of 18 percent and 20 percent, while a Canadian study estimates that many fleets could achieve a 10 percent fuel economy improvement through driver training and monitoring. A study for the European Commission estimates that an annual one-day driver training course will improve truck fuel efficiency by 5 percent.

What is the solution?

Well-trained drivers can reduce fuel consumption by applying simple techniques such as:

- use of cruise control
- coasting whenever possible
- limiting use of cab accessories
- smooth and gradual acceleration
- progressive shifting (upshifting at the lowest rpm possible)
- reducing maximum freeway speeds
- limiting truck idling and stops

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Employers, vocational schools, or outside consultants affiliated with training organizations can easily teach drivers these fuel-saving techniques. Many trucking companies also monitor driver performance and provide incentives to drivers who reduce fuel consumption. Electronic engine monitors can be used to review drivers' operating patterns and benchmark individual performance over time.

The results are in…

Most fleets can improve fuel economy by at least four percent through driver training and monitoring alone, saving more than $900 per truck each year in fuel costs. For a typical long-haul truck, the annual savings in fuel would recover within two years the initial cost of training and the purchase of related equipment such as an electronic engine monitor and recorder. Much greater additional fuel and maintenance savings are possible by using technologies that limit truck idling and highway speed.

Driver training will likely generate larger efficiency gains for vehicles in urban operations where shifting practices have more influence on fuel economy. Good driving practices are also part of courteous and safe truck operation that reflects well on the trucking company.

Next steps

Trucking firms should examine the benefits of driver training and implement appropriate solutions for their operations. Many firms have found driver training an effective way to reduce fuel costs. The American Trucking Associations (ATA) recommends that driver training programs to increase fuel efficiency should be implemented in conjunction with an incentive program that rewards drivers for performance. Successful programs usually have the following elements:

- management support
- regular payment of bonuses
- simplified administration
- payouts and progress posting performed at monthly or shorter intervals
- realistic goals

The following documents provided by ATA discuss these issues in more detail:

Fleet Managers Guide to Fuel Economy, ATA Publication number T0013

An Equipment Operating Costs Comparison. ATA Publication number T0006

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