

How SmartWay Benefits Small Fleets

Company Profile



West Marine's small private fleet

A leading retailer of boating supplies and accessories, West Marine operates 319 company-owned stores. West Marine maintains a small private fleet, consisting of three trucks (two International and one Freightliner) and five trailers (four Great Dane and one Freuhauf). The fleet operates out of the company's West Coast distribution center in Hollister, California. For other locations, it relies on common carriers.

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Why this Case Study is Relevant to You:

West Marine's small fleet was able to improve its fuel consumption by 44% through participating in SmartWay. Small fleets can learn more ways to save at epa.gov/smartway/smallfleets

West Marine's Private Fleet Operations

Like other small carriers, West Marine uses its own trucks to make deliveries to many of its retail customers. After drivers drop off merchandise at these stores, they stop at nearby suppliers to pick up new product and move it to the West Coast distribution center. Those backhauls help to ensure that drivers cover as few miles as possible with empty trailers. Fewer miles mean more production and less cost.

Trip recording computers installed on the truck collect data that is used to produce reports on driver performance and give them feedback.

Why West Marine Joined SmartWay

As a small business, West Marine takes its responsibility to the environment very seriously. For example, it has installed skylights and energy-efficient lighting fixtures in the Hollister distribution center, helping the facility cut energy consumption by 50-60 percent.

In early 2009, West Marine formed a fossil fuel committee to develop strategies for reducing its carbon footprint. The committee's goal was to reduce fuel consumption by finding ways to make the private fleet run more efficiently. Reducing fuel was one sure way to save the company money.

"I knew about SmartWay, so I started investigating it," says Maria Brandon, who is West Marine's Transportation Manager. "I saw that it offered a lot of good ideas for me to implement with the fleet."

Each year on its web site, the company publishes a report that details its many-pronged efforts to operate sustainably.

SmartWay Tools – Easy to Complete

Once West Marine decided to become a SmartWay Partner, they logged onto EPA's site to complete the online carrier tool. The tool collects information about fleet operations to establish baseline performance data.

The carrier tool was easy to complete because West Marine already had trip recording computers on its trucks, so they had the data needed for the form, such as the average number of miles the trucks ran per year and average fuel consumption in miles per gallon.



SmartWay Focus

As a SmartWay Partner, West Marine has concentrated on leasing equipment and encouraging driver practices that help the fleet consume less diesel.

Many small carriers lease their trucks, and West Marine is no different. Their truck leasing company, Penske, is also a SmartWay Partner. So when it came time for West Marine to lease new trucks for the private fleet in 2009, and to replace one of those trucks in 2011, Penske offered equipment from the list of EPA-designated SmartWay tractors on the program's Web site. The list ensured that West Marine would get trucks equipped with aerodynamics, gearing and other features promoting fuel-efficient performance.

West Marine also took advantage of user-friendly advice from SmartWay on how to reduce engine idling. One set of recommendations focused on making the truck cabs more comfortable for drivers who had to wait behind the wheel in warm weather. The goal was to make sure drivers wouldn't leave the engines idling in order to run the air conditioning.



"When we were looking at purchasing trucks, we wanted to make sure they had windows and vents that would open, so they'd get a cross breeze through the truck," Brandon says. The company also equipped the cabs with fans that run off the dashboard power outlet.

As a small business, West Marine understands the importance of educating drivers on fuel conservation. Data is pulled from the onboard computers showing exactly how well drivers are performing against company goals on idling and fuel efficiency.

"The reports I produce for the drivers are very important," Brandon says. "It becomes a competition with them to see who gets the best fuel mileage." Brandon recommends that other small carriers do this for their drivers.

Drivers also contribute to the conservation effort by bringing Brandon ideas about how to improve mileage performance. For example, as West Marine makes plans to add SmartWay-approved aerodynamic skirts to trailers in its fleet, drivers are checking out the skirts they see at truck stops, bringing back product details and cost information.

Results and Benefits

Before West Marine started operating SmartWay-approved equipment, the private fleet was running at an average of 6.1 miles per gallon. Thanks to the new trucks and a concentrated effort to reduce engine idling, the fleet now averages 8.8 miles per gallon, a 44 percent improvement.

Adding the skirts to the trailers should reduce fuel consumption by an additional 6 percent, Brandon says.

Burning less fuel saves the company money. And just as important, the SmartWay program gives West Marine another way to show its customers how well it's fulfilling its commitment to protect the planet.

"You have to be environmentally responsible," Brandon says. As a SmartWay partner, West Marine is doing its part and serves as a great model for how other small carriers can implement technologies and reduce operating cost.