

Fleet Management – The Vehicle

Would you believe there are an estimated 10,000 disabling injuries and over 200 deaths every year due to neglected maintenance on Canadian vehicles? This results in more than two hundred million dollars in lost wages, medical expenses, and property damage.

So what can we do about it? As obvious as it may seem, the first place to start is to ensure you buy the right car or truck for how it will be used. Vehicles differ in how well they protect passengers, their damageability in collisions, and their ease and targeting for theft.

VEHICLE SELECTION

Vehicle selection will impact your fleet costs, and the cost of insurance. The following are some factors to consider:

Vehicle Selection Factors

- Suitability for purpose
- Insurance cost
- Security/safety features
- Tires
- Cost of maintenance/service
- Depreciation
- Fuel consumption

You can also check government websites and consumer publications for articles on “How cars measure up”.

FUEL

Fuel costs are also a significant consideration, particularly in today’s environment of rising gas prices, and can account for about a third of the operating cost of a typical vehicle.

Some areas to consider to reduce fuel consumption include:

Avoid sudden, hard acceleration.

Accelerating is by far the “thirstiest” work you can ask your vehicle to do. Hard, sudden acceleration guzzles gas and wears out your engine and tires faster. You can minimize the need to accelerate by avoiding unnecessary slow-downs or hold-ups in the first place. This involves trying to anticipate traffic flows and disruptions so that you can maintain a steady speed. Racing to a red light or stop sign and then braking hard at the last minute is a futile and costly habit that wastes fuel and wears out your brakes. Instead, take your foot off the accelerator well in advance of the intersection and coast toward it. The red light may even turn green before you get there, so you may not actually have to come to a full stop after all.

Don’t drive aggressively. Aggressive driving in city traffic actually saves very little time but greatly increases fuel consumption and emissions. It is also hard on your engine and brakes. A European test showed that aggressive driving (“jackrabbit” starts from traffic lights and hard braking) reduced travel time by only 4% (the equivalent of 2 minutes on a 60-minute trip). However, fuel consumption increased by 39%, and some toxic emissions were more than five times higher! The safer, more fuel-efficient option is to accelerate smoothly and maintain a steady speed.

The same holds true for highway driving. It takes energy to get a vehicle up to cruising speed, and that energy is lost every time the vehicle is forced to slow down unnecessarily. Accelerate smoothly when passing other cars or when merging with faster traffic. Also, avoid the need to brake hard by leaving plenty of room between your vehicle and the one in front of you.

Reduce your speed. With most vehicles, increasing your cruising speed from 100 km/h to 120 km/h will increase fuel consumption by about 20%. On the other hand, reducing your speed from 100 km/h to 90 km/h improves fuel economy by about 10%.

Think before using cruise control. Many drivers save fuel by using cruise control to maintain a constant speed on the highway. In certain circumstances, however, skilled driving can be more fuel efficient than using cruise control. In hilly terrain, for example, it's more fuel efficient to let your speed drop going uphill and let it build again going down the other side. Often, however, traffic conditions won't let you use this technique.

Don't "ride" your brakes. Some motorists drive with their left foot resting on the brake pedal, a habit that increases fuel consumption and wears out the brakes prematurely. It can also be dangerous because it causes heat build-up in the brakes, which reduces braking power. In addition, your brake lights stay on all the time, which means that motorists travelling behind you have no warning when you actually apply the brakes to slow down or stop.

VEHICLE MAINTENANCE AND ROADWORTHINESS

A vehicle's condition and road worthiness will have a big impact on fuel consumption and, of course, safety.

It also impacts resale or trade in value. In fact, a few hundred dollars spent on maintenance and cleaning can return 5 to 10 times the cost in residual value.

We believe that responsibility for regular vehicle inspections and keeping a vehicle in top condition should be part of a driver's contractual obligation. The following checklist outlines a suggested routine for checking a vehicle's roadworthiness.

Vehicle Checks – (weekly/monthly)

- Gauges
- Radiator fluid levels
- Engine oil
- Spare tire and jacks
- First-aid kit
- Winter supplies
- Flares

Trip Check (before every trip)

Outside the vehicle:

- Check the area outside the vehicle for obstacles
- Do a visual inspection and test of lights, tires, etc.
- Check tire pressure with gauge if visual inspection indicates possible low pressure
- Check tire lug nuts for tightness
- Check brakes
- Check security of load and ensure all straps, chains and binders are tight
- Clean any windows of dirt, snow and ice, including lights both front and back
- Remove snow from roof and hood to prevent blowing over the windows
- Remove ice from wipers

Once inside the vehicle, check that:

- The proper seat, headrest position and mirror angles are set, (don't accept someone else's positions), to ensure a safe and comfortable drive
- Seatbelts and other restraints are fastened correctly
- All doors closed and windows cleared
- Mirrors are properly adjusted
- Gauges are working
- Make note of the type of braking system, so driving habits can be adjusted accordingly
- Test that the brakes are working, but also make note of their sensitivity (if you move from one vehicle to another in the course of the day, seldom are the brakes calibrated to the same firmness), and adjust your driving accordingly

It is not only your responsibility to ensure safe operation of your vehicles, it is just good business.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Please contact your Aviva Broker for a copy of the "Aviva Fleet Management Guide" and copies of the "In case of Accident Booklets".

Please also see Aviva Hardfacts:
Fleet Management Basics (A-5587)
Fleet Management – The Driver (A-5588)
Fleet Management – The Journey (A-5590)

For additional information on fuel efficiency check the Auto\$mart Programme at <http://www.oeenrncan.gc.ca/transportation/personal-vehicles-initiative.cfm>