HOME AND GARDEN COLUMN

FUEL SAVINGS

Concerns about limited fuel supply and skyrocketing prices have gotten the attention of residents and businesses. It cost me $75 to fill my minivan.

Conservation and ride sharing are ways we can cope with higher prices. Leaders suggest we need a more sustainable fuel source closer to home. One suggestion to support our car driven lifestyle while reducing our dependence on foreign oil production is to tap into offshore oil supplies.

Consumers can address these issues locally and really have an impact. Get smarter. Rethink our personal lifestyle. Choose to reduce, reuse and recycle. And then, voice your concerns with legislators and groups that support your thoughts.

Consumers are getting smarter by doing their homework and purchasing vehicles that are more fuel efficient. While manufacturers have been producing hybrid vehicles with nearly 50 to 60 miles per gallon capability, it has been hard for some to justify the upfront cost. Increase costs of fuel remind us every time we fill up that efficiency, getting more miles to the gallon, is important. Fuel economy ratings or MPG labeling is provided by manufacturers. Consumer magazines publish comparisons so you can quickly review this as one more factor in addition to passenger size, cargo space, horsepower and stylishness. Information is easily accessible at local libraries or on the internet.

State and federal governments have been under mandates to purchase a percent of vehicles with increased fuel efficiency, but our local governments are getting the hint and making purchasing decisions that will save taxpayer dollars.

Some transportation departments are investigating alternative fuels such as ethanol, compressed natural gas (CNG) and biodiesel that are less polluting but unfortunately higher price per gallon. Recent price hikes in petroleum based fuels have made some of the alternatives more economical.

The Florida Space Coast Clean Cities Coalition is a group that provides education on alternative fuels and goes one step farther to bring the alternatives to locals at a reasonable price.

They have worked on grants to develop fueling stations for CNG and ethanol and have been discussing options for bringing more affordable biodiesel onto the market.

This group has tremendous amount of print information on making choices and how alternative fuels work. Of special interest is A Guide to Alternative Fuel Transportation in Florida. Contact Bill Young at 321-638-1443 in Cocoa or go to the link above. Membership is open to anyone. The next meeting is scheduled for Friday, October 14 in Cocoa at the Florida Solar Energy Center from 1:30-3:30 pm. Fleet managers, purchasing staff, transportation engineers and vehicle sales staff will find the meetings beneficial as there is lots of idea sharing with others that are facing a similar budget crunch.

We can reduce our expenses for fill-ups at the pumps by rethinking our lifestyle. Look for ways to save trips. Our towns used to be designed for easy walkability. Now planners are moving back to the traditional neighborhood idea with a community hub of general stores, grocery, pharmacy and meeting places within easy walking distance or cycling distance to home and job. Now, carpooling makes sense.

Set up a ride board at work to find out who lives nearby to share the “commute” to work. Meet your children’s friends parents and work out school trip schedules. Use the school bus and public transit system whenever possible. Families can talk together and decide on workable strategies.

Because of economics, luxury cruising no longer makes sense. Combine trips and plan to stop along the way for various errands like picking up school supplies or last minute dinner items.
Choose the products you buy wisely and select reusable items whenever possible. Most plastics come from petroleum based products, but technology is changing. I just got a coffee cup as a gift that is made of corn plastic. Whenever possible, recycle plastic items. Osceola County Solid Waste Department has many recycling drop off locations around the county. Call 407-397-7653 for the location nearest you. UF/IFAS Extension has a publication on Enviroshopping to help you think through your purchasing decisions and reduce plastic and packaging waste. Call 321-697-3000.

Solar energy for power and hot water is another way of reducing the need for petroleum based electric power. Contact Florida Solar Energy Industries Association for information on products and businesses. Solar energy is intense here and we can use it to our advantage most of the year. I have not had power to my hot water heater since my solar panels were replaced in March. I have hot water even with all the recent cloudy, rainy weather.

If your concerns go beyond the wallet and you are concerned about how fuel supplies and prices will impact our military involvement over seas, your business or your family’s economic stability, be sure to stay in touch with local government officials.

These representatives are working on solutions to the problem but need to know you are concerned. Check your phone book or local library for contact information. Your leaders are available by mail, phone, email or you can schedule an appointment to meet with them or one of their aides to get your concerns across.

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