

Case study

Smarter driving The key to cutting fuel bills

Businesses and public sector organisations across Britain are helping their staff to cut their fuel bills by hundreds of pounds a year by encouraging them to drive smarter.

To put organisations and their staff on the road to cutting fuel bills, the Energy Saving Trust runs on-the-road smarter driving training courses, subsidised by the Department for Transport and delivered by experienced driving instructors.

The training takes just 50 minutes and starts and finishes at the workplace so disruption to the working day is minimised. It is also highly effective: the first 6000 drivers to take the course reduced their fuel consumption by an average of more than 15% after training. For a car driver covering 12,000 miles per year that equates to an annual saving of £200–250 and a reduction of approximately half a tonne of CO₂ emissions.

Experts agree that smarter driving also brings safety benefits and leads to lower accident rates, this is a result of putting greater emphasis on anticipation and reading the road ahead.

Among the organisations that have introduced the Energy Saving Trust's smarter driving course to staff are South Cambridgeshire District Council and the Shop Direct Group.

Case study: Shop Direct Group

Shop Direct Group is the UK's leading online and home shopping retailer, with annual sales of around £1.5 billion and five million customers. When the company offered Energy Saving Trust smarter driving training to its head office and call centre staff in early 2009, the lessons proved popular and were over-subscribed.

Phil Spick, Travel Plan Manager at the Liverpool-based organisation, promoted the course to car driving employees after attending an Energy Saving Trust presentation. Employees commuting largely through urban areas and those clocking up business related journeys were invited to participate in the course.

Mr Spick, who completed the course himself, explained: "These drivers will be the biggest beneficiaries of smarter driving techniques as they undertake a lot of stop-start motoring, which burns the most fuel."

He added: "Commuting can cost some drivers a lot of money out of their own pocket. The 2008 spike in fuel prices was costly for many people and we are now seeing fuel prices slowly rise again. The cost of commuting can eventually result in businesses losing valued employees. Promoting smarter driving courses as a cost saving measure can only help with staff retention.

"Staff viewed the programme as an employee benefit, good for the environment and good for their pocket," said Mr Spick. "By appreciating the financial savings to be made without affecting journey times, our employees soon realised the worth of the smarter driving course". Drivers reported that after completing the course their anticipation of what was happening on the road ahead significantly improved. This resulted in smoother driving which not only conserves fuel, but also makes them safer on the road."

Mr Spick said the courses were easy to organise and built on other environmental initiatives the company had already introduced. These include car sharing, a bicycle pool scheme and video conferencing.

The Shop Direct Group is a member of the United Nations Global Compact, a diverse group of 2,400 companies and other organisations that support corporate social responsibility that encompasses environmental protection.



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Case study: South Cambridgeshire District Council

Employees at South Cambridgeshire District Council achieved an average 18% reduction in fuel consumption after their smarter driving training and with trainees' annual mileages averaging more than 16,000 miles this would translate into average annual fuel savings of £340.

Cerise Bradford, Performance Manager—Planning & Sustainable Communities, was among the employees to complete the course:

"I used to fill up once a week, but now it's every fortnight," she said. "The savings are almost unbelievable. If I hadn't completed the course I would not have believed that by driving more smoothly and anticipating the road ahead that I would save so much."

So successful has the smarter driving course been among the 47 essential car users and seven casual users who completed the programme that the council hopes to enrol its 30 depot-based drivers on the programme.

"If we all took on board the lessons of this course, we'd not only save ourselves money, we would be doing a bit of good by saving fuel and cutting CO₂ emissions as well," she said.

"Drivers were nervous about the course and sceptical as to the claims made about fuel savings averaging 15%. But they took the instructors' advice on board and the feedback was superb with drivers saying they learned a lot, particularly about looking further along the road to anticipate what's ahead."

Among those completing the course was Councillor David Bard, who said "During my Smarter Driving lesson I managed to get MPG in a 1.4 l diesel up from 44.1 to 64.1 between the first (uninstructed) and third (following instruction) circuit. Back in my own car (1.6 l petrol Ford Focus) my consumption decreased from 33.5 to 46.2 MPG on the trip home. This is all done by controlling breaking, acceleration and timing gear changes, and on my average mileage translates to a potential saving of just under one tankful a month. So there are real savings to be made."

Councillor Jaime Dipple confirmed: "I almost doubled my MPG on the course. I have passed the tips I received on to friends and family and they are also reporting a measured increase in efficiency. I would thoroughly recommend the training to anyone interested in making savings."

Each trainee receives a certificate showing their percentage reduction in fuel consumption after training and stating how this would translate into annual financial and CO₂ savings. The figures are tailored according to the individual's car and annual mileage. At South Cambridgeshire District Council the former District Council Chairman, Cllr Jim Stewart presented the certificates to drivers. Ms Bradford said: "This gave it a sense of occasion. Many have since reported how they are driving safer and smarter as well as saving money. Smarter driving has been beneficial in peoples' private lives."

The smarter driving course is an initiative under the council's travel for work plan that sees the authority promote car sharing, cycling and walking to employees and local businesses. In the future the council is also looking to undergo an Energy Saving Trust Green Fleet Review.

Complimenting the Energy Saving Trust on the organisation of the programme, Ms Bradford said: "Communication was excellent and employee availability was easily accommodated to fit in with working hours."



Course details

- The Energy Saving Trust provides the car, fuel and insurance as well as the highly-experienced driving instructors
- To minimise disruption courses start and finish from the workplace. Pick-up and drop-off can be from the company car park or wherever is most convenient
- The training is available for all employees, regardless of whether or not they drive on company business
- Each trainee is presented with a certificate showing his/her percentage saving on the day and how this would translate into annual financial and CO₂ savings.

To find out more about the Energy Saving Trust's smarter driving course call **0845 602 1425** or go to www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/smarterdriving

