

The Consumer Advocate
A DCC Educational Newsletter
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SOARING OIL PRICESOARING PRICES – HOW TO AVOID RUNNING ON EMPTY

By now, we have all experienced the harsh impact of rising oil prices. In the summer months, most of us feel the problem at the pump as we fill up our gas tanks. While prices vary a little depending on the brand and the region, American consumers are finding themselves in the position of paying a small fortune for fuel.

Here are a few tips that can help you reduce your fuel expenses.

- First, be sure you go to a self-serve pump, because prices will be cheaper than getting full service.
- Second, be sure you are getting the least expensive type of gas your car manufacturer recommends. Specifically, different types of gas are graded by amount of octane. The higher the octane, the higher the price. Read your car's owner's manual or call the manufacturer directly to see if your car will operate sufficiently when using the lowest octane gas. Most will. There's no need to spend extra money on a higher quality gas if a less expensive one will suffice.
- Third, consider carpooling. Most of us value our independence and enjoy the luxury of coming and going as we please. But even if you can carpool once or twice a week, you will find that the savings on gasoline will be well worth it. Talk to your employer, who may sponsor a program to match employees up according to where they live. On your own, talk to acquaintances and friends who may be interested in carpooling or who may know someone else who could be interested. You will save on gas, and you will also save wear and tear on your car.
- Fourth, if you have a larger vehicle such as a mini-van or Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV) you should seriously consider trading in this "gas guzzler" for a more fuel-efficient car, which typically costs less to buy, has significantly better gas mileage, and is better for the environment. Now may be the right time for you and your family to make this change.
- Fifth, log onto www.gaspricewatch.com and locate the gas stations in your area which have the cheapest prices.
- Finally, high oil prices affect more than what we pay for gas for our vehicles. In the winter, the high price of oil will affect Home heating oil prices as well. Consider joining a Home heating oil cooperative. Cooperatives can usually offer a bulk rate and provide less expensive heating oil. This can be a real money-saver in the winter months. To find one in your area, do a web-search using key words such as "Home heating oil cooperative" + your city.

BACK TO SCHOOL SAVINGBACK SAVINGS

Well, it's that time of year again. All the circulars and TV advertisements are reminding us that school is just around the corner for our kids. That translates into spending a lot of money for new outfits and school supplies, right? Well, not necessarily. Use these money-saving tips to help you spend the least amount possible while still having everything your child needs.

- **Be sure to avoid shopping in one long shopping spree.** Many people feel overwhelmed by all the back-to-school necessities they need to get, and prefer to get it all done in one long shopping session. But this is not usually a good idea. First of all, it is unlikely that you will find all the different types of items you need on sale at the same time. Second, if you do it all in one day, after the first few hours you will be tired and willing to overpay just to hasten the process along. Third, purchasing everything at once will take a big bite out of your budget, leaving you more vulnerable to using credit cards unnecessarily.

- **Before you even decide what your child needs, review current inventory of clothing and supplies.** Have your child try on all clothing from last autumn and spring to see what still fits. Then determine how many new clothes they actually need. Sort through last year's supplies. Those pencils and pens probably still work just fine, and there may be some leftover pads and loose-leaf binders that are also in good shape.

- **After you have made a list of all the necessities, then shop for sales and bargains.** Sometimes the best prices can be found after school starts. Teach your child the art of patience and compromise. If you can afford to do so, offer your child one brand new outfit that can be worn on the first day of school, and then purchase other needed outfits after school begins to take advantage of those savings.

- **When shopping for school supplies, try to get solid colored binders, pencil cases, and lunch boxes** so that they can be decorated with removable stickers of your child's choice. Next year, these items can be re-used, and new stickers can be applied for decoration. It's a lot cheaper to buy new stickers than it is to buy new binders and lunchboxes!

- **On any day you shop, decide ahead of time how much you will spend.** If possible, bring that amount of cash with you and not one cent more, in order to avoid the temptation of over-spending. Decide ahead of time that you will avoid using credit cards (an item on sale at 15% off doesn't do you much good at all if three months later you are still paying it off at 18% interest!).

- **Visit the thrift shops and consignment shops in your area** and see if you can find some high-quality, reasonably priced, second-hand clothing for your kids. Because they grow so fast, often second-hand children's clothes still look virtually new.

- **Tell your friends and family members that you are willing to accept all hand-medowns.** Don't complain if what you get isn't perfect! These clothes may do in a pinch, may be perfect for rainy weekends and after-school play, and you may just find something in there that your child can wear to school happily.