

## **Workplace Implications with the Rising Cost of Transportation**

**Misty-Lee Carlson\***

The rising cost of fuel forces both employers and employees to review their budgets and bottom lines. Inflation and increasing fuel costs experienced by employees not only put pressure on employers, but have been the catalyst for the review of workplace policies and best practices.

We are all cognizant of the growing difficulty in recruiting new employees. Soaring fuel costs greatly influence an employee's decision about the distance and frequency of their potential commute. If employers have been creative with workplace policies and practices, some ingenious solutions can be created.

Employers can implement office programs to encourage car-pooling. For example, drivers could be paid a nominal per diem, enticing employees to make use of the car-pooling system. This might ultimately help to offset the costs associated with maintaining a large office parking lot. Employers could also organize a car pooling system or contact an agency to provide assistance with promoting and organizing car pooling matches and schedules.

Employers can help their employees to cope with the growing cost of transportation by leasing vehicles that are more fuel efficient, or purchasing dual fuel, or hybrid vehicles. Not only would they be assisting their employees, but promoting a "greener" work environment.

Several other options employers are already embracing are the more traditional condensed work week, flex-time and telecommuting. The condensed work week, also known as a compressed work week, consists mainly of working the same number of hours, but spread over a fewer number of days. For example, if your regular work week is a 40 hour work week, eight (8) hour shifts, Monday to Friday, then a compressed work week could be a 40 hour work week, ten (10) hour shifts, Monday to Thursday. This would require the employee to commute one less day a week, while still providing the same number of hours to the company.

The second option mention above was flex-time. Flex-time affords employees the opportunity to put in the hours when necessary, and take that time off at a later date, when their presence at the office isn't mandatory. It could also be used in such a way

that an employee could have a later start to their day, but would remain at the office longer to make up for having a later start. Flex-time might allow employees an opportunity to car-pool with individuals with whom they might not otherwise have considered because they work on different schedules.

The third aforementioned option is that of telecommuting. This is a newer system that is rapidly increasing in popularity. Telecommuting allows employees to conduct their work from home. In addition to alleviating the necessity of commuting to the office almost completely, some statistics have shown that employees who telecommute are actually more productive throughout their work day.

While condensed work weeks, flex-time and telecommuting are all viable options for helping employees to reduce their costs for commuting, it is important to note that such programs should be chosen carefully with the type of work force in mind. Not all individuals will succeed without direct supervision or a structured work environment. The program should be matched to the employee for it to be successful.

Employers should pay careful attention to the markets, anticipate how market changes might affect their employees, and work with their employees to develop strategies to help lead them through these challenging financial times.

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\* Misty-Lee Carlson is one of our latest associates to join the Integrity Management Consulting Group. She possesses a solid background in the legal field and in human resources management. She is a great addition to the IMCG team.