

Dallas Morning News

Editorial: Employers Should Help Clean The Air

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Traffic congestion wastes time, wastes money, wastes gasoline and makes people late for work. In sum, it's bad for business.

Traffic congestion also adds tons of emissions needlessly into the North Texas skies. That adds to the smog problem and sends people to the doctor's office, emergency room or worse. Again, a waste of time and money. Again, bad for business.

Understanding their stake in a healthier, more prosperous region, hundreds of community-minded employers in North Texas have taken extraordinary and voluntary steps to get cars off the road to help clean the air.

These workplaces deserve a salute. In fact, many have already received one.

Each year, the North Texas Clean Air Coalition challenges employers to measure their commuter-friendly initiatives against a list of best practices.

Organizations that ring up high point totals are placed on an annual best-places-to-work list. Fifty-four Dallas-Fort Worth employers earned that distinction last year.

Some of their activities – like providing transit passes – are familiar to many. Others are more imaginative, such as:

Seventy-two employers in the Clean Air Coalition program have employee-transportation coordinators who make sure workers are up to date on commuter benefits. First Southwest Co. of Dallas is one example.

Seventeen organizations offer free or reduced-cost parking places to carpoolers. Example: Alcon Laboratories.

Twenty-one provide amenities to bicyclists, such as secure bike racks, lockers and showers. Example: Lockheed Martin.

Forty-four allow for flexible hours so workers can avoid rush-hour congestion. Example: Bell Helicopter Textron.

Eighteen provide “teleworking” incentives such as home office or computer equipment so employees can work from home. Example: Mary Kay.

Seven provide shuttle service to and from rail or transit centers. Examples: Texas Instruments and Medical City Dallas.

One of the most widespread ride-reduction measures is the offer of free or subsidized transit passes to workers. DART reports that 224 employers now provide this benefit. All told, employer-based programs will have an estimated 130,000 participating workers next year, translating into 118,000 vehicles off the road.

Such efforts are key to achieving compliance with federal clean-air standards. Those standards are meant to protect the public's health and make sure the outdoors are not hazardous to joggers, golfers or kids on the ball field.

North Texas has thus far flunked the clean-air test. That's not only bad for people's health, it degrades the region's business climate.

The Clean Air Coalition renewed its annual challenge to employers last week with an expanded program that covers a wider array of activities. It deserves support. LEARN MORE about and enroll in the North Texas Clean Air Coalition's annual Working for Clean Air program. dallasnews.com/extra

Cutting Emissions

Big and little ways employers help:

- Allow telecommuting so employees can work from home.
- Conduct more meetings through conference calls.
- Stagger shifts to avoid rush-hour commutes.
- Provide incentives for employees to live closer to the workplace.
- Give preferred parking to drivers of clean technology vehicles.
- Offer gift cards for employees who take public transportation or car pool.
- Subsidize employee-operated vanpools.
- Offer to mentor other businesses in commuter-friendly practices.