

## Some employers offer help with transportation expenses

Posted 5/8/2006 4:10 AM ET

By Barbara Hagenbaugh, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — When PAN Communications held its weekly staff meeting last week, three of its 60 employees found \$50 Mobil gas cards under their chairs.

The Andover, Mass.-based public relations firm is doing what many companies are doing: trying to alleviate their employees' gas price pain, possibly boosting morale and reducing turnover.

More than one-quarter of companies are helping out employees because of recent increases in gasoline prices, according to a survey by the Society for Human Resource Management. The group received responses from 380 businesses April 25-May 1.

While that means most companies aren't aiding their workers, the percentage that were was up from a survey taken in late August and early September when gasoline prices jumped to record highs following Hurricane Katrina.

The nationwide average price of a gallon of regular gasoline was \$2.907 Sunday, up 30 cents from a month ago and 15 cents lower than the record high set in September, according to motor club AAA.

In addition to offering free gas, companies are giving employees money to take public transportation and allowing them to work from home. The most popular move among employers, according to the resource managers' survey, is increasing the reimbursement rate for workers who use their personal cars for company business.

More than one-fifth of the businesses said they were raising the reimbursement rate to the maximum deductible rate as set by the IRS. The IRS allows companies to deduct 44.5 cents per mile, up from 40.5 cents in 2005.

During the last four months of 2005, the rate was increased to 48.5 cents after the hurricanes.

What companies are doing:

- Officials at Shawnee, Kan.-based Nazdar hung up a large map of the area and are encouraging employees to put in push-pins to denote where they live, to help set up carpools. People who carpool will get preferred parking. The printing firm is also reminding employees that many can work 10-hour days, four days a week, rather than 8-hour days, five days a week, to save on commuting, says Anissa Elsey, head of human resources.

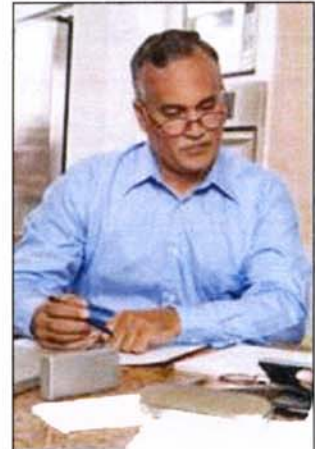
"We do what we can to improve the morale here and find ways to keep the turnover low and make it a good place to work," Elsey says.

- Orthodontist Jeff Mastroianni of Glen Carbon, Ill., recently added \$1 to the hourly salary for a receptionist he hired after several people he interviewed asked if he would help offset the added transportation costs. "I've never been asked that before," he says.

- Technology company Compuware of Detroit is adding two vanpools for its workers on June 1, bringing the total for the company to 13, says Cecilia Cannon, manager of the commuter-assistance center at the firm.

Assisting workers when gas prices rise is a good way to keep employees happy, which can help retention, says Richard Chaifetz, CEO of ComPsych, an employee assistance provider. He advises firms to "be flexible and get creative."

Advertisement



Delegate  
your expense-  
tracking to us.

citi

LEARN MORE >>