

FTC FACTS for Consumers

Consider the Alternatives: Alternative Fueled Vehicles and Alternative Vehicle Fuels



Driving a car fueled by something other than gasoline or diesel fuel is no longer the stuff of science fiction. In addition to conventional gasoline and diesel fuel, reformulated — cleaner — gasoline and alternative fuels now are sold in many parts of the country. Alternative fuels such as methanol, ethanol, compressed natural gas, liquefied petroleum gas, and electricity produce fewer tail pipe pollutants than conventional gasoline and diesel fuel. Using them could improve air quality.

Congress passed the Energy Policy Act in 1992 to promote the use of alternative fuels. For example, the law requires owners of fleet vehicles to purchase a certain number of alternative fueled vehicles. Congress also directed the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation's consumer protection agency, to issue labeling requirements for alternative fuels and alternative fueled vehicles. The Alternative Fuels and Vehicles (AFV) Rule and the Fuel Rating Rule require fuel dispensers and alternative fueled vehicles to be labeled with information to help consumers make knowledgeable decisions when it comes to filling up or buying a vehicle. The AFV Rule applies to new and used alternative fueled vehicles that are sold to consumers or leased to them for at least 120 days.

Facts for Consumers

ALTERNATIVE FUELED VEHICLES

AFVs are vehicles that operate on alternative fuels, such as methanol, ethanol, compressed natural gas, liquefied petroleum gas, or electricity, as designated by the U.S. Department of Energy. Some AFVs that can run on conventional fuels like gasoline as well as alternative fuels, are called dual-fueled vehicles.

The required labels must be in plain view on the surface of all new and used AFVs. The labels on new AFVs must include the vehicle's cruising range as estimated by the manufacturer, as well as general descriptive information. It's important to know how many miles your new AFV will travel on a supply of fuel because, gallon-for-gallon, some AFVs don't travel as far as gasoline-powered vehicles.

The labels on new and used AFVs also advise consumers to consider the following items before buying or leasing an AFV:

- **Fuel Type and Availability.** What kind of fuel powers the vehicle? Find out whether refueling or recharging facilities are available in your area for the fuel the vehicle uses.
- **Operating Costs.** Fuel and maintenance costs for AFVs can vary considerably and may differ from gasoline or diesel-fueled vehicles. Visit www.fueleconomy.gov for detailed information on gas mileage and cruising range for conventional vehicles and AFVs.
- **Performance/Convenience.** Vehicles powered by different fuels vary in their ability to start when they are cold; their acceleration rates; the time it takes to completely refill the vehicle's tank; and how they are refueled.
- **Energy Security/Renewability.** Find out where and how the fuel powering the vehicle is produced so you can anticipate long-term fuel availability at a reasonable price.

- **Emissions.** All vehicles affect the environment directly (from tailpipe emissions) and indirectly (how the fuel is produced and brought to market). Compare the environmental costs of driving an AFV to driving a gasoline-powered vehicle. Visit www.epa.gov/greenvehicle/ for comparative information about vehicle emissions.

Hybrid electric vehicles offer another option for car buyers, although the AFV Rule's labeling requirements do not apply to them. According to DOE and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), these vehicles combine the benefits of gasoline engines and electric motors and can be configured to achieve a variety of objectives, such as improved fuel economy and increased power. For more information from DOE about hybrid electric vehicles, visit www.eere.energy.gov/cleancities/vbg/consumers/hybrid.shtml.

ALTERNATIVE FUELS

The Fuel Rating Rule and the AFV Rule cover methanol, ethanol, natural gas, liquefied petroleum gases, hydrogen, coal derived liquid fuels, biodiesel, and electricity, among other fuels. For example, methanol is an odorless, clear liquid produced from natural gas, coal, or biomass resources, such as crop and forest residues. It usually is sold as a blend of 85 percent methanol and 15 percent gasoline. Ethanol, a liquid produced from grain or agricultural waste, usually is sold as a blend of 85 percent denatured ethanol and 15 percent gasoline.

The labels for these fuels are orange to distinguish them from gasoline octane labels, which are yellow. They must be placed on the fuel dispenser so that they are fully visible to consumers.

Gasoline labels tell you the octane rating. Alternative fuel labels describe the fuel and its principal component(s). The rating for an alternative fuel — other than electricity — is the commonly used name of the fuel and the amount of its principal component, expressed as a

minimum percentage. For electric vehicle fuel dispensing systems, the fuel rating is a common identifier — like electricity and the system's kilowatt capacity, voltage, amperage, and whether the voltage is alternating or direct current, and whether the system is conductive or inductive.

CONSIDER THE ALTERNATIVES

Why consider switching to alternative fueled vehicles or alternative fuels? According to EPA, the tailpipe emissions from cars and trucks — unburned hydrocarbons, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, particulate matter, and carbon dioxide — account for almost a third of the air pollution in the U.S. Driving alternative fueled vehicles could reduce the level of vehicle emissions. And many alternative fuels are produced domestically, so they promote economic activity in the U.S.

At the same time, consider that some alternative fuels have a lower energy content than gasoline. On a gallon-for-gallon basis, some alternative fuels do not allow consumers to travel as many miles as they could in a vehicle powered by gasoline or diesel fuel. In addition, an AFV may cost more than a comparable gasoline-powered vehicle.

The good news is that you can help reduce pollution from vehicle emissions even if you don't choose an AFV or alternative fuel. If you live or work in an area where air pollution is a continuing problem, your local service stations may carry reformulated gasoline, which has added oxygen and burns more cleanly than conventional gasoline. It is required in areas with the most serious levels of ozone air pollution and is being used by choice in others.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Energy Policy Act of 1992 gave the Department of Energy primary responsibility for telling the public about alternative fuels and alternative fueled vehicles and promoting their use. Call DOE's toll-free National Alternative Fuels Hotline, 1-800-423-1DOE, for more information about alternative fuels and alternative fueled vehicles, or visit the Department's Alternative Fuels Information Center websites at www.afdc.doe.gov or www.eere.energy.gov/afdc. Additional information on automobile safety is available from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's toll-free hotline (1-800-424-9393) and website, www.safercar.gov.

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive, and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop, and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft, and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

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The Federal Trade Commission is the nation's consumer protection agency. Here are some tips from the FTC to help you be a more savvy consumer.

1. Know who you're dealing with. Do business only with companies that clearly provide their name, street address, and phone number.
2. Protect your personal information. Share credit card or other personal information only when buying from a company you know and trust.
3. Take your time. Resist the urge to "act now." Most any offer that's good today will be good tomorrow, too.
4. Rate the risks. Every potentially high-profit investment is a high-risk investment. That means you could lose your investment — all of it.
5. Read the small print. Get all promises in writing and read all paperwork before making any payments or signing any contracts. Pay special attention to the small print.
6. "Free" means free. Throw out any offer that says you have to pay to get a gift or a "free" gift. If something is free or a gift, you don't have to pay for it. Period.
7. Report fraud. If you think you've been a victim of fraud, report it. It's one way to get even with a scam artist who cheated you. By reporting your complaint to 1-877-FTC-HELP or ftc.gov, you are providing important information to help law enforcement officials track down scam artists and stop them!

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION	ftc.gov
1-877-FTC-HELP	FOR THE CONSUMER

Federal Trade Commission
Bureau of Consumer Protection
Office of Consumer and Business Education