



Gas prices play growing role in job decisions

Americans looking for ways to shorten commutes, stretch pay

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NBC News

Updated: 7:21 p.m. ET April 11, 2006

The cost of driving the 40 miles from the east side to the west side in Columbus, Ohio, is rising again. So much so that gas prices are determining where some people work.

"One of the No. 1 reasons why people turn down jobs when I call them is because of the time it takes to get there in reference to the gas prices," says Kathlene Tarsitano, who heads a job placement service.

It's a big concern for Rita Milam, who recently switched jobs to be closer to home — cutting her mileage in half and stretching the \$9 an hour she makes at a document scanning company.

"I need to have enough money to pay my bills, and all that money that I'm putting into my gas tank is taking it from me," says Milam.

She's not alone. A survey by the firm Manpower last fall found that almost 5 percent of people changed jobs because of fuel costs, and 35 percent were looking for a job closer to home. It's clear that fuel prices are an increasingly important factor in a tightening labor market.

"Companies need to take rising gas prices into account as they're looking to recruit new employees, and offer creative options," says Melanie Cosgrove-Holmes, Manpower's vice president of corporate affairs.

And so to hold down the high cost of getting to work, employment services say some companies are now starting to offer telecommuting, four-day weeks and carpooling.

In South Florida, a state-run carpooling service had an average of 30,000 users last year. Today it has 70,000.

"You are targeting the commuter that used to spend \$20 to fill up and is now spending \$40," says Jim Udvardy, the director of South Florida Commuter Services. "And that's affecting his personal budget."

People are riding together or reducing travel time to make sure hard-earned paychecks are not guzzled at the pump.

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