

CommuteSmart Carpooling Program

The University of Alabama is helping employees address high fuel costs by launching the CommuteSmart online carpool matching program. While everyone is feeling the pain at the pump, approximately 14% of the UA employees commute more than 35 miles a day round trip while 5% travel from 60 -180 miles every day.

The Department of Human Resources is partnering with CommuteSmart, an organization sponsored by the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham. The organization was started in 1999 to help alleviate traffic congestion and reduce air pollution in Jefferson and Shelby counties. CommuteSmart has now grown into a statewide initiative that is encouraging individuals throughout Alabama to change their commuting habits.

The cornerstone of the CommuteSmart program is the online carpool matching software. Individuals interested in finding a carpool enter information such as their home address, work address, work starting/ending time, etc. in the online database. Once the data is entered, the CommuteSmart database matches individuals who have similar schedules and work locations. The "trip matches" include the person's email and telephone contact information, along with other matching preferences. Individuals who wish to form a carpool merely contact the individuals with whom they match to begin discussing carpool possibilities.

"The CommuteSmart program is a very logical way to help faculty and staff deal with the rising costs of gasoline," said Charlotte Harris, Associate Vice President of Human Resources. "Over time we hope to offer carpooling incentives such as preferential parking spaces as well as giveaways and perks. At the present time, gas prices alone might be enough for individuals to take a serious look at carpooling."

Harris acknowledged that everyone might have to consider adjusting their schedules slightly to make the program a success. "I've personally made it a point not to schedule meetings late in the afternoon especially if there is potential for the meetings to run late and someone in a carpool will be affected," Harris said. "Delaying one person in the carpool due to a meeting running after 5:00 p.m. also negatively impacts all the other participants so I try to finish meetings on time."

Stefan Kim, who works in Financial Affairs Information Support, carpools 112 miles round trip every day from Birmingham. The carpool not only saves him money, but his daily commute is less stressful. "I've significantly reduced my expenses and the two hour commute passes very quickly due to the lively conversation. We've gotten to know and enjoy each other," Kim says.

He says his group does have guidelines for everyone to follow. "You must have clear boundaries in order to make the carpool work well," he says. "No smoking, leaving on time in the mornings and in the afternoons and good, consistent communications among the group. The key is just being respectful."

Individuals who are interested in learning more about the carpool program may do so by visiting www.hr.ua.edu/benefits and clicking on the "Carpool Program" button or they may call the HR Service Center at 348-7732.