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Wal-Mart Announces Fuel Efficiency Gains

By [KATE GALBRAITH](#)

The giant retailer has been making sustainability strides — and plans to introduce alternative fuels in some of its trucks.

As Wal-Mart undergoes a changing of the guard, with a [new chief executive](#) in office since Sunday, the company says that it has improved fuelfleet efficiency by more than 25 percent since 2005.

The retailer, which has one of the largest trucking fleets in the country, is also testing out alternative fuels with a small number of its trucks, according to a statement scheduled for release today.

Fifteen trucks based near Phoenix will be retooled to run on used cooking grease, using the oil left over from frying chicken or other uses in Wal-Mart delicatessens. The company says it is also introducing a handful of diesel hybrid and liquid natural gas trucks at other facilities.

Chris Sultemeier, Wal-Mart's senior vice-president of transportation, credited several factors for Wal-Mart's increased fuel-efficiency — which came even while shipments increased. These included smarter loading techniques and reduced packaging.

Over the course of one year, he said, the company shipped 150 million more cases, while driving 7 percent, or 90 million miles, less.

Wal-Mart is also using special tracking software to optimize drivers' routes — a strategy that [UPS](#) and other companies are also deploying.

Before, Wal-Mart gave drivers “a lot more leeway to pick the route they preferred to drive,” said Mr. Sultemeier. “Today, we're dictating how they drive, where they drive.” For example, he said, the company is aligning stores and distribution centers so that trucks run fewer miles when empty. The company is also optimizing trucks' delivery schedules.

Wal-Mart has been a driver on the [sustainability front](#) for some time — though environmentalists like Steven Hamburg, the chief scientist for the Environmental Defense Fund, remain only cautiously optimistic, as my colleagues Stephanie Rosenblum and Michael Barbaro [pointed out recently](#):

While environmentalists give Wal-Mart kudos for the changes it has made, they say that much of what it has achieved so far amounts to collecting low-hanging fruit. The company sells tens of thousands of products, and has demanded the overhaul of only a handful, they say. “The jury's out in the long term,” Mr. Hamburg says.

One of the reasons for the fuel-efficiency push, said Mr. Sultemeier, is that it is a win-win for the company and for customers.

“Everything we do delivering goods to stores adds cost,” he said. “The more efficiently we can do that and take costs out, the better for our shoppers or consumers, because we can deliver a

better price.”

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