CLIMATE CHANGE AND FUEL EFFICIENCY

2016 was the hottest year on record. Additionally, greenhouse gases surpassed 400 parts per million, the highest in nearly one million years. Some of the effects of climate change have been much higher melting of ice across the earth, sea waters warming and accounting for higher sea levels and surges, and an increased number of droughts and forest fires. Although we cannot pinpoint individual storms to climate change, the trend has been for hurricanes and other storms to become more intense during the period scientists have been tracking weather records.

Here is how the PCUSA views the issue of climate change: "The Presbyterian Church (USA) declares its serious concern, in concert with ecumenical partners, that the global atmospheric warming trend (the greenhouse effect) represents one of the most serious global environmental challenges to the health, security, and stability of human life and natural ecosystems."

Burning fossil fuels in personal vehicles accounts for nearly one-fifth of all US greenhouse gases (one fifth of that from extraction, production and delivery of the fuel; four-fifths from our tailpipes). Although the federal government's fuel economy standards have been useful in controlling greenhouse gases from vehicles, consumers have tended to buy more gas-guzzling vehicles. More restrictive standards were set to take place in the period of 2017-2025, but now, federal agencies have decided to review these standards. While the arguments among climate change deniers, governmental employees, scientists, manufacturers, producers and consumers play out across the country, we as individuals can take measures to decrease the carbon footprint from our own vehicles. Here are some suggestions:

1. Combine your trips. Make a list of your errands and appointments in the same direction and do them all in the same trip. When going to an event, see if you can carpool with a neighbor or friend.

2. Find out the proper number of pounds for your tires, and make sure they are inflated to that pressure. Under-inflated tires (very common in cold weather) can cause you to lose 1-2 miles per gallon, as it's like driving with your parking brake on. Incorrect inflation can also cause you to have to replace your tires sooner. Under-inflated tires can lower gas mileage by 0.4 percent for every pound per square inch drop in pressure of all four tires. (www.fueleconomy.gov)

3. Don't be an aggressive driver. The faster you drive (over 60 miles per hour) or the more jackrabbit starts you make, the more gasoline you waste – anywhere from 5 percent around town to 33 percent at highway speeds. (www.fueleconomy.gov)

4. Observe the speed limit. Each mile driven over 60 miles per hour is like paying 20 cents more per gallon. (www.fueleconomy.gov)

5. Avoid unnecessary idling. Turn your car off even when you're "just running into the store, etc." When you buy fast food, go into the restaurant rather than buying food at the window. Idling guzzles gas and produces unnecessary pollution! It does not take more gas to restart the engine than it would save from turning off the engine. (www.fueleconomy.gov)

6. Have your air filter inspected every time you change your oil. If it is dirty, replace it, as a dirty air filter can cause you to lose 10 percent of your gas mileage.

7. Have your gas cap inspected. If it is damaged, loose or missing, replace it and avoid having your gas vaporize. Gas vapors cause ozone (smog) formation. Gas caps need to be airtight to avoid loss of fuel.

8. Have your spark plugs inspected, and replaced them if dirty. If spark plugs are misfiring, that costs mileage.

9. Keep your engine tuned. Fixing a vehicle that is noticeably out of tune can improve gas mileage by as much as 40 percent. (www.fueleconomy.gov)

10. Reduce excess weight in vehicles. For every extra 100 pounds you can remove from your vehicle, you can increase gas mileage by 20 percent.

11. Buy a car with high efficiency ratings.