

FSU researcher: As gas prices climb, employee productivity plummets

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Rising gas prices are affecting the productivity and morale of employees. Credit: Florida State University

Rising gas prices are affecting more than the family budget. More pain at the pump results in more employee stress on the job, says Wayne Hochwarter, the Jim Moran Professor of Management at Florida State University's College of Business.

“People concerned with the effects of gas prices were significantly less attentive on the job, less excited about going to work, less passionate and conscientious and more tense,” Hochwarter said. “These people also reported more ‘blues’ on the job. Employees were simply unable to detach themselves from the stress caused by escalating gas prices as they

walked through the doors at work.”

Hochwarter gleaned the information by surveying more than 800 full-time employees this spring when gas prices hovered at about \$3.50 per gallon. All of the people surveyed work in a wide range of occupations, primarily in the southeastern United States. All drove personal transportation to work and had an average commute of 15 miles each way.

Survey respondents said gas prices were foremost on their mind, including a disgruntled factory worker who wrote, “I spend more time at work trying to figure out what I need to give up to keep gas in my tank than thinking about how to do my job.”

Hochwarter’s research will be submitted for publication later this summer. Among his findings:

- 52 percent have reconsidered taking vacations or other recreational activities;
- 45 percent have had to cut back on debt-reduction payments, such as credit card payments;
- Nearly 30 percent considered the consequences of going without basics including food, clothing and medicine;
- 45 percent report that the escalating gas prices have “caused them to fall behind financially”;
- 39 percent agreed with the statement “Gas prices have decreased my standard of living”; and
- About 33 percent -- or one in three -- said they would quit their job

for a comparable one nearer to home.

Hochwarter's discussions with employees confirm the study's results. Many employees report that gas prices rank as the No. 1 water-cooler discussion topic, ahead of family, sports or work, he said. He found little difference in responses among different ages, gender, work tenure and occupations.

"Several employees said they simply could not escape the media onslaught of bad news regarding the future of gas prices, and many reported their financial futures were looking bleaker and bleaker," Hochwarter said.

As gas prices rise, so does the stress. Consider the words of Sandy, a medical records clerk: "The more it goes up, the more behind I get. If gas goes up to \$5 or \$6 a gallon, I just don't know what I'll do."

Source: Florida State University

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