

## Nonprofits get pumped by high gas prices, too

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DURHAM -- Asking for money. Finding joint drop-off spots. Eliminating left turns.

Those are some of the tactics two Triangle organizations that help hungry North Carolinians are employing to cope with the high price of filling up their delivery trucks.

The Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina spent \$150,000 out of its roughly \$7 million budget on diesel fuel in fiscal year 2007-08 that ended in June.

"The final costs last year were up 60 percent over what we had budgeted starting the year," said Allen Reep, the Food Bank's acting manager of public relations.

"We had budgeted in a healthy increase in fuel and we hit that pretty early."

The Food Bank operates 22 diesel trucks that are driven some 400,000 miles a year to serve 900 agencies in 34 counties. The trucks travel 1,500 miles at a cost of \$1,100 each day.

The charity has budgeted \$220,000 for fuel in 2008-09.

Diesel fuel cost \$4.18 a gallon Monday in the Lower Atlantic, a region that includes North Carolina, according to data from the Energy Information Administration, a branch of the U.S. Department of Energy. That was down 16 cents a gallon from the previous Monday's prices but up nearly \$1.38 from the cost a year ago.

Diesel prices topped \$2.95 a gallon in September 2007 and came to \$3.08 the next month before jumping to the \$3.40 mark in October 2007. Prices breached the \$4 per gallon level in April, approached \$5 a gallon after that and are again in the \$4-\$4.50 range now.

The Food Bank is hardly the only organization hit by the price hikes.

"As the year has progressed, our agencies have felt the fuel costs and not [been] able to come to Food Bank as frequently, so we're having to deliver more and more [to] the more than 200 agencies that are out in the rural parts of our counties," Reep said.

The Food Bank is holding a fuel drive this month in a bid to raise \$25,000. Each dollar contributed will help the group deliver \$8 worth of food or four meals.

Despite the need, responses through Friday had been poor, Reep noted, with the group receiving less than \$1,000.

Donations to the fuel drive can be made at the organization's Web site, [www.foodbankcenc.org](http://www.foodbankcenc.org).

David Reese, chief operations officer of the Inter-Faith Food Shuttle, said that his organization is taking several steps to cut down on fuel costs. They include making sure that tires on the shuttle's 11 refrigerator vehicles, two minivans and one pickup truck are inflated to the recommended levels. Proper tire pressure boosts fuel efficiency.

"Every dime saved is a dime that helps us go ahead and deliver food," Reese said.

The group has also implemented what Reese calls cross-docking. "Instead of driving around the county to each and every agency, we'll have a bunch of agencies meet us in one central location and make our delivery that way."

Another money-saver that Reese is experimenting with is eliminating as many left turns as possible from delivery routes in order to cut down on waiting time.

The shuttle serves seven Triangle-area counties.

While Reese wouldn't release budget numbers, he said this year's fuel expenditures are about 30 percent to 40 percent over what was originally budgeted.

Despite the high price of driving, Reese said he had yet to see any drop-off among volunteers who deliver food-filled backpacks and grocery bags to schoolchildren and public housing residents for his organization.

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