

Americans have a grand love affair with the automobile. This love affair has blossomed into a massive dependency on oil. While America makes up only 5% of the world's populations, we consume 25% of the world's oil. Our extreme dependency is not entirely necessary. We Americans need to reduce our dependency on this valuable commodity. We can make some small daily adjustments that can impact our national dependence. One simple but overlooked method is to reduce our trips through the drive thru window.

The drive thru window is convenient. The customers do not need to move from the cozy confines of their vehicles. That convenience comes with a hidden price-the wait. As most people wait in the drive thru, they leave their engine running. That idle of the vehicle wastes gas. The amount of fuel wasted in the drive thru may seem insignificant until these minutes are added up.

According to Quick Serve Restaurant (QSR) magazine, the national average time spent in a drive thru for 2015 is 222 seconds. That is Three minutes and 42 seconds with the vehicle running and going nowhere. So basically during that time, the vehicle is getting 0 miles per gallon. That time and gasoline does seem quite small until those numbers are applied to a larger scale.

According to Energy.gov a small sedan with a 2.0-liter engine with no load burns .16 gallons per hour. Less than half of the vehicles on the road are 2.0 liter so we can safely round up to .2 gallons per hour for further figures. As we apply the per hour consumption to drive thru windows, it will take 16.21 trips through the drive thru to equal an hour of idling – a minimal amount at best. The numbers do not show a valid point until those are multiplied.

On April 21, 2016 at a Rapid City McDonalds restaurant there were 1431 visits through the drive thru window. Nationally, McDonalds is a bit faster. They average 181 seconds per visit. Apply that to our figure and drive thru customers sat idling for 71.9 hours. Those drive thru customers wasted on the short end 14.38 gallons of fuel. On the local scale, this is not much but the love affair with the drive thru is larger than Rapid City.

According to QSR, in 2011 Americans used the drive thru 12.4 billion times. This number does not include non-restaurant drive thru visits. Using the appropriate figures, Americans wasted 152,933,333 gallons of gasoline just waiting.

Not all drive thru use is unnecessary. Many families like the convenience of not having to unbuckle and buckle up kids. Keeping kids focused in a parking lot can be difficult. There are reasons such as this to take advantage of that convenience. Avoiding the drive thru lane for

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every trip is an unrealistic expectation. Making small changes and avoiding the drive thru is not unrealistic.

We can all do our part to reduce our oil dependency. Every small action can be multiplied and have a large impact. Reducing our unnecessary trips through the fast food drive thru window is just one small effort we can make.