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Contractors are using GPS tracking systems to control more than just vehicle costs

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When Ron Schuman first put Global Positioning Systems into his company vehicles he noticed some startling things.

Trucks pulling trailers traveled 90 mph in some cases and employees sometimes misstated their hours worked. So Schuman, the vice president of American Home Maintenance, sat down with his employees and explained his findings and future expectations.

Thanks to the GPS systems, Schuman said he has been able to increase efficiency and employee honesty. He installed the systems into 15 vehicles and plans to ultimately put them into 85. The systems are capable of logging when the vehicle starts, how long it drives, how long it idles, rate of speed and much more.

"Just having the GPS in all the vehicles is a big plus," Schuman said. "We are going to be getting a discount on insurance and saving a lot of time."

The systems can also be used to help police hunt down a stolen vehicle.

Schuman said the benefit of the tracking device has been "immeasurable."

"There was probably at least two hours in one day that my technician was wasting," Schuman said. "It was the way calls were being dispatched, directions, etc."

The GPS system will also notify employees when they have to get an oil change or service the vehicle.

According to Myron Hammes, president of GPS Fleet Management, GPS systems were developed in the late 1960s by the U.S. Department of Defense. In 1978 the first GPS satellite was launched, and today there are currently 29 satellites orbiting in space. Magellan GPS introduced the first hand-held receiver in 1989, and in 2000 the government turned off the air code that required civilian receivers to be within no more than 100 meters of accuracy. That level was changed to ten meters of accuracy, and widespread use of GPS has since taken off.

"My smallest customer has one truck and our largest has 200," Hammes said. "The majority are in



A GPS unit installed under the dashboard of a service truck.

the five to 25 range."

Some of the first industries that jumped on board with using GPS systems to manage vehicle fleets were people in the pool and landscaping industries, Hammes said. Recently, many owners in the HVAC industry have been using the technology to increase efficiency of their businesses.

"Ninety percent of my customers will say it pays for itself in 90 days," Hammes said. "The systems run about \$500 and the companies save about \$100 to \$200 each month just on fuel."

Many industries including restaurant cleaning, fencing companies, construction, cabinet companies and others use the systems. Hammes said the technology has gotten to the point where batteries and parts are small enough that the units can go on things like trailers and backhoes.

"There are people out there who typically sell a

product," Hammes said, "but we really do play a consulting role. We will show them the pros and cons of different brands and work in phases to help them implement it into their company."

GPS Fleet Management installs both active and passive GPS systems. The passive systems use computer chips to log what a vehicle does and report it to the employer when it returns from a trip, and the active systems use cellular technology to show the employer the vehicle's location at any time.

For Schuman, the decision to install GPS systems has been an important one.

"The hardest hurdle that the owner has to deal with is the employee doesn't like it, and they feel like you're spying on them," Schuman said. "But when things are smoother and they don't have to call into the office as much it's easier. They are finally starting to come around."