

Fresno Co. workers could lose cars

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By Brad Branan / The Fresno Bee

Fresno County may soon grab the keys to hundreds of government cars assigned to county employees because they don't drive enough to meet requirements for such usage.

More than 70% of the 800 assigned county vehicles aren't driven 1,000 miles a month, the minimum required under county policy, according to an independent audit reviewed by the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday. The figure doesn't include cars from the Sheriff's Office, which wasn't included in the audit.

Auditors also found that 54% of the 141 vehicles assigned to county employees for take-home use also fail to meet the monthly-use requirement, even though they're driven back and fourth from home every day.

Auditors from Harvey M. Rose Associates didn't determine if county employees were inappropriately using the cars, but concluded that the county needs to update its criteria for assigning cars. The board expects to review a proposed policy for taking home county vehicles in two weeks.

County administrator John Navarrette said he needs to further examine usage patterns to determine if some county employees still need cars even if they're not driving the minimum distance.

Nevertheless, even if the county stops using just half the vehicles not meeting the distance requirement, it would save more than \$5 million on replacement costs alone, based on figures in the audit. Navarrette said some of the savings could be offset by increased mileage costs.

While supervisors are eager for immediate cost savings due to the county's budget problems, they're not likely to find many. The county isn't planning to buy many vehicles in the coming year. Still, a change in the county vehicle policy would save money from fuel and other transportation costs. The audit didn't estimate those savings.

The audit, commissioned by the Board of Supervisors, looked at how the Fleet Services Division manages one of the county's biggest costs -- transportation. Auditors turned up a number of inefficiencies in how the county buys and maintains vehicles.