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Tire Experts Recommend Nitrogen

[VIDEO: Ben Tracy reports.](#)

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(WCCO) You've probably heard the warnings: Keep those tires properly inflated for safety's sake. Now a growing number of tire experts say drivers should let the air out and use nitrogen instead.

Professionals from NASA, commercial airlines and even NASCAR drivers have long used nitrogen instead of compressed air to inflate their high-performance tires. Now everyday drivers are being steered toward it, too.

The Tire Industry Association says nitrogen is better than compressed air because it leaks much more slowly than oxygen. Since as many of 85 percent of drivers don't check their tires on a regular basis, experts say maintaining inflation is key.

"The closer you can maintain the tire pressure to that recommended set pressure by the manufacturer, you're going to have better tread wear, you're going to have better fuel mileage, you're going to have improved handling," said Kevin Rohlwing of the Tire Industry Association.

While nitrogen isn't available at most gas stations, Costco is one of a growing number of large chains and small tire shops now offering the air alternative.

"Once we did some research into nitrogen and realized the benefits that nitrogen offered to a tire over compressed air, it was very obvious to us that this was a better source for tire inflation," Costco's Robert Moyer said.

Experts stress it is safe and nonflammable, and researchers at Ford have found nitrogen doesn't cause rubber to break down as quickly as air. Nitrogen is basically dry, whereas moisture-filled air causes corrosion.

"If you're inflating with nitrogen, you're going to eliminate that problem," the Tire Industry Association's Rohlwing said. "There's not going to be any moisture in the tire."

Despite the benefits, nitrogen is hard to find in the Twin Cities. WCCO-TV called 10 local tire dealers, and only one, Costco, fills tires with nitrogen.

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"We haven't jumped into it, but we are thinking about it," said Tim Seehusen, owner of Hopkins Firestone.

The equipment isn't cheap - it costs anywhere from \$4,000 to \$12,000.

"It's not an easy chunk of change," Seehusen said, "so hey, is my customer going to get any value for the cost that I'm putting into his tires?"

Seehusen thought the benefits would come from offering his customers a safer ride, as well as less pressure to check the pressure.

"(Using nitrogen leads to) very low maintenance," Seehusen said. "It will last three times longer than your normal air pressure that's in your tires now."

That's enough of a reason for the Hopkins tire expert to make the nitrogen change.

"Yeah, I think it's probably something I would be interested in," Seehusen said. "You bet."

While nitrogen keeps tires inflated longer, drivers should still check their tire pressure regularly. In the event the tires need to be manually re-inflated, drivers should use air until they can visit a professional.

