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Houston Chronicle

A CENTURY TOGETHER

Commuter-friendly jobs lauded

EPA lists 30 boosters of clean-air benefits

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Just as many companies offer health insurance to promote their employees' well-being, they should provide commuting benefits to help reduce stress, traffic congestion and air pollution, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which will recognize Houston's 30 Best Workplaces for Commuters today.

Companies that won the distinction range in size from 17 employees to 16,000 and include several Texas Medical Center hospitals, government agencies and oil companies.

"A lot of companies agree it's better to offer money for a transit pass than to put in more parking spaces," said Stephan Sylvan, an EPA commuter choice team manager from Washington in town this week to promote the program. "It helps to have many different options."

Three-fourths of Harris County workers drive to work alone, according to the 2000 U.S. Census.

Reducing that number will not only ease congestion and the cost of building more roads but also will help the Houston region meet mandated federal clean air requirements by 2007, according to the EPA.

The agency launched the Best Workplaces campaign three months ago here to get Houston employers involved in alternate commuting plans.

"Our research shows 20 to 30 percent of employees will shift from driving alone to what we call 'less-stress rides': bus, vanpool, carpool, etc.," Sylvan said. "Houston suffers from pollution and air quality problems. A 20 to 30 percent cut will not solve the entire air quality problem, but it will put a good dent in it."

The 30 firms to be honored at this morning's City Hall ceremony have implemented the Best Workplaces for Commuters program for their combined 65,000 employees. The program requires employers to give their workers at least one of these main benefits:

RESOURCES

• **On the Web: EPA's commuter-friendly program**

The winners:

- Air Liquide
- America
- American Electric Power
- Aramco Services Co.
- Baker Atlas/Baker Hughes INTEQ
- BHP Billiton
- CenterPoint Energy
- Central Houston
- City of Houston
- Deloitte & Touche
- Department of Veterans Affairs
- Medical Center
- Devon Energy
- Dynegy
- Employee Benefit Solutions
- Enbridge Employee Services
- Fulbright & Jaworski
- Greater Houston Partnership
- Houston Endowment
- Kinder Morgan
- Marathon Oil Co.
- Marsh Houston
- Methodist Hospital
- Metro
- Occidental Petroleum Corp.
- St. Luke's Episcopal Health Systems
- Teppco
- Texas Children's Hospital
- TIRR Systems
- UT Health Science Center
- Waste Management
- Williams Cos.