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Matt Zoll, the bicycle and pedestrian program manager for Pima County, is a regular bicycle commuter. He bikes because "it's fun being a kid again."

POOL IT; BIKE IT

16 workplaces rated best for boosting commuting alternatives

By Karen Mracek
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Imagine that along with your job offer letter and your 401(k) information, you received a list of car-pooling buddies.

That's what the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Greater Tucson Area's Best Workplaces for Commuters Coalition are driving toward.

Sixteen Tucson businesses and government entities were recognized as the Best Workplaces for Commuters on

Tuesday, a designation that can be used by businesses as an advertising and recruiting tool.

"A long-term goal of the program is for this to be seen as a competitive advantage for businesses," said Steve Offutt, program manager for the EPA, who flew in from Washington, D.C., to attend the event.

Employer-sponsored commuting programs can also help to maintain Tucson's quality of life by reducing travel times. Offutt said the average delay for Tucson-area commuters doubled from 1990 to 2000. He said that if Tucson

continued at this rate through 2010, workers could expect commuting times similar to those Phoenix and San Diego drivers experience now.

At the University of Arizona's McKale Center Tuesday, the EPA and the Best Workplaces for Commuters Coalition honored companies that offer competitive commuter benefit packages to employees. The coalition, the first in Arizona, formed in May to improve commuter programs in Tucson.

To qualify as a Best Workplace for Commuters,

businesses had to meet the EPA's National Standards of Excellence by offering transit passes, car-pool and van-pool subsidies, telecommuting options and other incentives.

The National Bank of Arizona offers incentives for employees who car-pool, including a monthly drawing for a covered parking space, said Karen Goldberg, co-director of the bank's travel program. The bank was honored along with nine other employers for offering a 100

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COMMUTE

Working at home offered as option

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percent bus subsidy to their employees.

IBM, a charter member of the Best Workplace program, offers employees the chance to work from home. Almost 300 of IBM's 1,700 employees already take advantage of the company's TeleWork program, said Barb Ricca, IBM's travel reduction coordinator. Telecommuting programs like IBM's, which started in 1994, meet the National Standard of Excellence if at least 6 percent of employees take part.

Deb Caldwell, career services program manager and coach at IBM, works from home a couple of days a week.

"There are certain tasks that lend themselves well to telecommuting," said Caldwell, explaining that "some projects require you to be there more than others."

And sometimes a commuting method is simply a matter of personal preference. Matt Zoll, the bicycle and pedestrian program manager for Pima County, rides his bike to his Downtown office four or five days a week, mainly because "it's fun being a kid again."

Seventy-six percent of Pima County workers drove to work alone in 2001, according to the American Community Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau. Thirteen percent car-pooled, and only 2 percent took public transportation.

A goal of the Greater Tucson Area's Best Workplaces for Commuters Coalition is to reduce the environmental impact of drive-alone

commuting.

"We recognize that streets into Downtown are congested," said Jim Glock, director of the Department of Transportation for the city of Tucson, who encourages commuters to look for alternative commuting methods.

Commuting programs benefit both the employer and the employee, said Ricca of IBM. "It leads to happy, productive employees."

For IBM, the program also helps retain employees who prefer to work from home. Employees who take advantage of travel programs can save money in gasoline, parking and vehicle costs.

For Tucson, it means national recognition through the program's Web site and at the Association for Commuters Transportation conference, which is attended by transportation experts. It was at this conference last September that the Pima Association of Governments got involved with the Best Workplaces for Commuters program, said Gayle Johnson, employer representative for the Pima Association of Governments.

"We jumped at the chance to do this, because it meant that we could be the first in Arizona," Johnson said.

The Pima Association of Governments monitors the Travel Reduction Program, which annually surveys transportation methods at businesses with 100 or more employees. This survey was used to make sure that 14 percent of a company's workers do not drive to work alone, a requirement for the EPA's program.

"The thing we are most proud of is that because of the EPA, we have national

The commute

► To see if your company qualifies as a Best Workplace for Commuters, go to www.bwc.gov

HOW PIMA COUNTY WORKERS GOT TO WORK IN 2001:

76% drove alone

13% car-pooled

2% walked

2% took public transportation

3% used other means

4% worked from home

On average, it took commuters 22 minutes to get to work.

SOURCE: American Community Survey 2001 (U.S. Census Bureau)

EMPLOYERS RECOGNIZED AS THE BEST WORKPLACES FOR COMMUTERS

- Abrams Airborne Manufacturing
- City of Tucson
- Devon Gables Health Care Center
- IBM
- National Bank of Arizona
- Pima Association of Governments
- Pima County
- Raytheon Missile Systems
- Southern Arizona Health Care Systems
- Sun Tran
- University of Arizona
- Town of Marana
- Tucson Airport Authority
- Tucson Electric Power Co.
- Ventana Medical Systems Inc.
- Viscount Suite Hotel

recognition as a city that cares about the environment," Glock said.