

# Fleet department keeps county vehicles rolling

- Amanda Baillie, Nov 9, 2015 – Sierra Vista Herald



Fleet Director Ruben Miranda's department maintains more than 870 County vehicles and pieces of motorized equipment

At its regular vehicle auctions, competition for Cochise County's used autos can be fierce.

Watching from the sidelines as the online bidding wars for cars and trucks plays out, Ruben Miranda is always astounded by the interest in these hotly contested sales.

"I get calls all the time from people wanting to know when our next auction will be," said the County's Fleet Director.

The popularity of these government surplus events is testimony to the attention the vehicles have received during their time with the County, Miranda believes.

And with nearly 500 cars, vans, trucks and off-road vehicles clocking up more than 5 million miles a year, that is no easy task.

"The secret to our success is that we take care of the equipment and vehicles and we make sure we are good stewards of the public's money," he said. "Last year, with all of those miles that were driven, we had only two engine and four transmission failures."

Following a consolidation in 2012, the County's Fleet Services department has taken on the sole responsibility of handling the organization's 489 light vehicles and 387 pieces of heavy motorized equipment.



Mechanic Steven Eason works on a 2007 Chevy Impala at the Fleet Department's workshop in Bisbee

The operation is run like a private rental car company where the various County departments lease the vehicles they need from Miranda and his team.

Miranda prides himself on the fact his department runs so efficiently that Enterprise Rent A Car was unable to match the County's cost effectiveness when they conducted an evaluation to determine whether they could provide the same service more cheaply.

"We rent each vehicle out to the departments and charge them monthly per mile for maintenance, eventual replacement and fuel costs. When a vehicle reaches 180,000 miles it is replaced," he explained, adding vehicles must be utilized more than 12,000 miles per year to be replaced with a brand new one.

It is at that point the used car or truck goes to auction and is usually sold for at least its Kelly Blue Book recommended price, bringing between \$50,000 and \$70,000 annually into Fleet Services' replacement fund.



Ruben Miranda takes to the wheel of one of the off-road vehicles utilized by the Sheriff's Department and part of the Cochise County fleet

"We service all of our light fleet vehicles every 4,000 miles or four months," said Miranda, who has managed Fleet Services for eight years and has been in the auto industry for 40 years. "People call us about those auctions because they know they have been taken care of."

While some of the vehicles could probably extend beyond the 180,000 miles, Miranda believes it is not cost effective to keep an auto running to the point where it will likely need more repairs.

"We just find that's the sweet spot for us," he said. There is one exception, however.

"We run the Sheriff's vehicles to 160,000 miles. Those guys are covering 6,500 square miles and averaging 4,000 to 5,000 miles every month. That's a lot of miles and a lot of service they provide to the tax payers."

In a bid to get the most bang for its buck, Fleet Services repurposes the Sheriff's Department vehicles and hands them over to other County staff who drive less than 12,000 miles a year.

"We then mile them out until they reach 180,000," said Miranda, adding that Fleet Services custom fits each Sheriff's Department vehicle with the necessary law enforcement equipment, which can take up to two weeks. "We squeeze as much as we can from our vehicles."

The same principle applies to the heavy equipment, such as motor graders, dump trucks and backhoes, which are used until they clock up between 8,000 and 10,000 hours.



The County's Fleet Department keeps a wide range of parts and supplies on hand to keep its vehicles and equipment in top condition. Once again, the care and attention given to each piece of equipment pays off when Fleet Services needs to replace them.

"With some of the equipment the manufacturers will guarantee us a trade-in price because we have maintained them so well," said Miranda. "We typically get half the cost at trade-in."

When a County department is ready to trade up and replace a used vehicle, the chances are the next car or SUV will be smaller.

"Whenever we replace vehicles we are always looking to downsize and improve on the emissions and the footprint we have. We're also starting to bring in a few hybrids," Miranda said, adding that 95% of the fleet is made by General Motors which often provides no cost training to the 15 technicians and mechanics. "We always try and downsize from big trucks to midsize vehicles, which saves on costs and fuel. Whenever a department needs a new vehicle, we always have that conversation first to try and save money. We also send out a questionnaire to each department asking about its driving habits and business uses for each vehicle. They have to justify why they need each vehicle."

"We also use the state contract which allows us to buy directly from the manufacturer, or we go out for bid. Cochise County has a local vendor preference policy because we want to try and keep the dollars here."

Additionally, Fleet Services takes advantage of inmate labor to cut down on costs, paying 25 cents per hour. A number of the inmates have since gone on to find work as mechanics for private businesses since their release.

Safety, as well as efficiency, is also a priority for Miranda and his staff, who are told never to let a vehicle leave the workshop unless they would be comfortable putting their wife and children in it.

Miranda is also part of a seven-member internal accident risk review board that meets once a month to assess any accidents or damage and to determine how to minimize any future issues.

"It's a great program for awareness and it makes sure our employees drive as safely as possible," Miranda said.

### ***By the numbers:***

489 – number of vehicles in the light fleet division

5.1 million – number of miles driven by County employees annually

670,000 – number of gallons of fuel used by the light fleet and heavy equipment annually

387 – number of motorized heavy equipment

67,000 – number of hours clocked up annually by heavy equipment

180,000 – number of miles a light vehicle has to reach before replacement

160,000 – number of miles a Sheriff's Department vehicle has to reach before replacement

20 – number of Fleet Services staff

6 – number of inmates working in Fleet Services

25 – number of cents paid hourly to inmates