Higher fuel prices mean higher maintenance costs for superintendents using gas- and diesel-powered turf-care equipment. Some superintendents, however, have reduced maintenance costs by going electric.

David Boughter, assistant superintendent for Coyote Hills GC in Fullerton, Calif., has cut fuel costs by using an electric greens mower. “We don’t worry about gas prices and fuel consumption with it,” says Boughter, who has a Ransomes E-plex II electric greens mower.

Not only do electric mowers eliminate traditional fuel costs, they also require less preventive maintenance. And no, electric mowers aren’t more expensive than gas and diesel mowers.

It’s easy to calculate the operation costs of a gas- or diesel-powered triplex mower compared to an equivalent electric triplex mower by looking at the mowing schedule — the average number of hours it takes to mow per day, the amount of fuel used and the number of mowing days per year, says Peter Whurr, vice president of product management for Textron Turf Care And Specialty Products in Racine, Wis. To calculate maintenance costs, consider the number of oil changes, hydraulic fluid changes, air filters and coolant changes in a year, Whurr adds. This provides a conservative estimate since it doesn’t include labor costs.

Rising fuel costs may drive other superintendents (especially those eyeing the bottom line) to consider electric alternatives to traditional mowers. Fuel prices have steadily increased since March 1999, more than doubling in some regions.

A reason for the higher prices is a reduction in the amount of crude oil produced by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries — an attempt to boost prices that have fallen to a 12-year low.

Although OPEC recently agreed to increase oil production by 7 percent, or 1.7 million barrels per day, many industry analysts expect higher prices to continue through the summer.