



Getting Green: Your Carbon Footprint Explained

We are all hearing a lot about how to reduce our carbon footprint, but it can be difficult to understand what exactly this means. Here are a few facts about your carbon footprint and what you can do to reduce it at home and at the office.

Q: What is a Carbon Footprint?

Your carbon footprint measures the impact your activities have on the environment, determined by the amount of greenhouse gases produced through burning fossil fuels, electricity, heating and transportation. The average U.S. household has a carbon footprint of 16,008 pounds per year.

Q: How is a Carbon Footprint Calculated?

Your carbon footprint is made up of two parts: primary and secondary footprints. Your primary footprint is a measure of direct emissions from burning fossil fuels. This includes your home gas, oil, and coal use, home electricity, private transportation, public transport, flights, and food and drink. Your secondary footprint includes your share of public services, financial services, recreation and leisure, house buildings and furnishings, car manufacture and delivery, and clothes and personal effects.

Several factors affect your footprint: the number of people in your household, what kind of heat you use in your home, miles driven per year and fuel efficiency of your automobile, number and duration of flights, your average monthly electric, gas, and fuel bill, and recycling habits.

Tips for reducing your carbon footprint at home and at work

Carbon emission from your home is directly correlated to everyday energy consumption. One way to reduce your carbon footprint is to improve energy efficiency:

Inside your home:

- When appliances are not in use, turn them off and unplug them. Even small appliances like cell phone chargers waste energy when plugged in all day. It is called ghost-electricity.
- Take shorter, cooler showers and turn off the tap when brushing your teeth.
- Recycle everything you can.

- Replace incandescent light bulbs with CFL low energy bulbs, which use just 20% of the energy of a normal light bulb and last 15 times longer.
- When replacing older appliances, always opt for appliances that use less power and receive a good energy rating.

At your office:

- Only print as many copies as absolutely needed. Instead of having each employee have their own files, create a central filing system to avoid having to make many copies of the same documents.
- Use smaller fonts when printing internal documents to save paper and ink.
- Recycle everything, including ink cartridges and toner. Ask local suppliers if they can deliver supplies in reusable bins rather than cardboard boxes.
- Turn off and unplug equipment when not in use.
- Telecommute whenever possible, but make a commitment to do it at least one day per week.

For your meetings:

- Ask your caterer for biodegradable tableware (plates, cups, utensils, etc.), or use china and metal silverware.
- Monitor meeting room temperatures. Turn the heat down a few degrees in winter and up a few degrees in summer, and encourage attendees to dress in layers.
- Make sure lights and AV equipment in session rooms are turned off when not in use. Ask your AV provider to unplug equipment at night.
- Offer a carbon-offset donation on your registration form; Many companies will plant trees for as little as 50 cents each.
- Provide materials that are ecofriendly: recyclable, printed on recycled paper, or go paperless altogether.

Want to learn more?

Visit additional resource sites, such as:
www.carbonfootprint.com
<http://whatsmycarbonfootprint.com>
www.zerofootprintkids.com •