

World Environment Day • 5 June

Twelve Steps to Help You Kick the CO₂ Habit



Whether you are an individual, an organization, a business or a government, there are a number of steps you can take to reduce your carbon emissions, the total of which is described as your carbon footprint. You may think you don't know where to begin, but by reading this, you have already begun.

1. MAKE A COMMITMENT

Reducing your carbon footprint is no different from any other task. Telling people you will reduce carbon emissions may seem simplistic, but even simple actions like announcing your commitment to going carbon neutral can be effective, while the simple act of asking for ideas can lead to creative and innovative solutions.

2. ASSESS WHERE YOU STAND

It is likely that carbon will eventually be judged as an atmospheric pollutant and regulated accordingly, with consequent costs—and opportunities—for all sectors of society. Knowing where and how you generate greenhouse gases is the first step to reducing them.

3. DECIDE AND PLAN WHERE YOU WANT TO GO

Based on your assessment of climate-related risks and opportunities, a strategy and action plan can be developed. Targets help focus efforts and also provide a benchmark for measuring success. Most homes or businesses can reduce energy use by 10 per cent—which almost always results in a 10 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions—with a one year payback or less. A plan to reduce carbon emissions will first focus on the type of energy and the way it is used; for example electricity for buildings and fuel for transport. Reducing this energy can create instant savings.

4. DE-CARBON YOUR LIFE

There is a broader way to think about carbon and climate. Everything an individual, organisation, business or government does or uses embodies some form of carbon, either in products themselves or in the energy and materials it takes to make them. If consumers, manufacturers and lawmakers all think 'low carbon' and 'climate friendly' savings in carbon emissions will multiply. One way of reducing your carbon footprint is to waste less time and energy on travel. Cities can improve public transport options, while individuals can car pool or use public transport.

5. GET ENERGY EFFICIENT

Very simple measures can lead to immediate savings. Just turning off unused lights, motors, computers and heating can substantially reduce wasted energy—and money. Generally, laptop computers use less energy than desktop computers and LCD monitors use less energy than CRT screens. Also consider what to do with equipment when its useful life is finished. Improving the efficiency of your buildings, computers, cars and products is also the fastest and most lucrative way to save money, energy and carbon emissions. This does not mean going without. Energy efficiency is about increasing productivity but doing more with less.

6. SWITCH TO LOW CARBON ENERGY

If possible, switch to energy sources that emit less carbon and can reduce costs and emissions. In many parts of the world customers can choose to have a percentage of their electricity supplied from a renewable energy source, such as a wind farm or landfill gas project. These 'green choice' programs are maturing and proving to be a powerful stimulus for growth in renewable energy supply. Today, more than 50 per cent of all US consumers, for example, have an option to purchase some type of green power product.



7. INVEST IN OFFSETS AND CLEANER ALTERNATIVES

There is a limit to how much efficiency you can squeeze from your lifestyle or your organisation's operations, or how much renewable energy you can employ. The choice for those who wish to compensate for their remaining emissions is to fund an activity by another party that reduces emissions. This is commonly called a 'carbon offset' or 'carbon credit'. The term carbon neutral includes the idea of neutralising emissions through supporting carbon savings elsewhere.

8. GET EFFICIENT

Looking at your life or business through a carbon neutral lens can help you in other ways by increasing the efficiency of resource use, avoiding and reducing waste and ultimately improving your overall performance and reputation. Economists are fond of saying that there are no banknotes lying around because someone will have already picked them up. In climate change, there are still plenty of banknotes just waiting to be picked up. After all, carbon is generally the waste product of producing energy, and reducing waste and becoming more efficient is always a good idea. Integrate the 3R approach—reduce, reuse and recycle—into your thinking.

9. OFFER—OR BUY—LOW CARBON PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

'Design for sustainability' is a new approach which considers environmental aspects at all stages of development to create products with the lowest environmental impact throughout the product life cycle. Ecodesign is an important strategy for small and medium sized companies both in developed and developing countries to improve the environmental performance of their products, reduce waste and improve their competitive position on the market.

10. BUY GREEN, SELL GREEN

In many countries consumer surveys report that growing numbers of consumers are willing to buy green products if given the choice. However, the market for green products remains underdeveloped because people still find it difficult to locate products or trust their environmental claims. Businesses can help consumers to be more climate friendly, from the online click for carbon offsetting on a tourism booking website to the label on a product at the local store.

11. TEAM UP

Many private sector companies are increasingly working with non-governmental organisations, cities or governments to identify and implement best practice solutions to reduce emissions.

12. TALK

The increasing importance of climate change means that companies and organisations will need to communicate. Tools for verification and reporting guidelines with recognised indicators are critical to ensure transparency. One example is the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) (www.globalreporting.org). Reducing emissions, particularly by improving efficiency is a win-win situation that can also enhance a company's reputation. Consumers and investors alike are requesting information on a company's response to risks and opportunities related to climate change.

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