

Going Carbon Neutral

Measure, Reduce, Offset

Climate change has become a crucial issue that businesses and other organizations must address to stay competitive. To show environmental stewardship and help minimize their impact on the climate, progressive thinking companies, governments, and organizations around the world are pledging to fight climate change, or global warming, by reducing their carbon footprints and going “carbon neutral.”

The act of going carbon neutral -- declared the word of the year in 2006 by the New Oxford American Dictionary -- is to achieve a zero net of greenhouse gas emissions. This is accomplished by implementing a variety of strategies to reduce the amount of carbon released by an individual, corporation, institution, or government and balance the remaining emissions by investing projects that reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions elsewhere.

The basic considerations when going carbon neutral are as follows:

- Develop reliable GHG inventories
- Incorporate GHG considerations into core business strategies
- Implement in-house projects to reduce GHG emissions
- Evaluate buying or selling of external offsets
- Purchase or bank GHG emission reductions

To get there, the following three steps should be taken:

1. Measure your carbon footprint;
2. Develop strategies to reduce the footprint; and
3. Purchase “offsets” for any remaining emissions.

✓ **Measure your carbon footprint**

To measure your carbon footprint, a company must compile a GHG inventory of the emissions associated with its operations. While each company may define the boundaries of its footprint slightly differently, a number of internationally accepted protocols exist to guide a company’s measurement efforts. Most companies will begin by measuring emissions from direct combustion of fossil fuels (known as Scope 1 emissions) and emissions associated with the company’s consumption of electricity (known as Scope 2 emissions). Many companies also will choose to measure other emission sources, including business travel, commuting, and “supply chain” materials used such as paper and equipment that the company procures.

By measuring its carbon footprint, a company will understand where to focus its efforts on reducing its emissions as cost-effectively as possible. A robust GHG inventory also will provide a baseline for the company to use to measure its progress annually in reducing its climate impact.

✓ **Reduce your carbon footprint**

After a baseline is established, identify options to reduce emissions such as:

- Increase energy efficiency in buildings, factories, or transportation
- Rely on renewable energy that uses natural resources such as sunlight, wind, tides, and geothermal heat. These technologies range from solar power, wind power, and hydroelectricity to biomass and biofuels for transportation.
- Engage employees through activities such as offering commuter benefits, telecommuting, and reducing energy use and waste through efforts such as powering down computers at the end of the day and reducing the need to print documents.

✓ Offset your carbon footprint

For remaining emissions that can't be directly reduced, offsets can be an important part of an effective climate policy because they can be implemented quickly and at a relatively low cost, while providing tangible environmental and economic benefit to communities around the world.

- Purchase high quality carbon offsets that demonstrate “additionality” – in other words, projects that 1) wouldn't have happened without the offset and 2) provide net environmental benefits -- and are projects that can be monitored and verified.
- Join voluntary programs such as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Green Power Partnership to increase the use of green power among U.S. organizations.
- Undertake creative projects within the local community to encourage emission reductions (e.g. helping to replace a local school's inefficient boiler)

Reducing energy use and eliminating emissions are the best ways to slow the rise of GHG gases in the atmosphere. Carbon offsetting can help make the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy and the development of energy efficient goods and processes. Responsible and ethical engagement in a combination of these processes will help to ensure a sustainable future.

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