

Everyone is Talking about Reducing their “Carbon Footprint”, How do I do this!

Footprints leave lasting impressions on a surface long after we are gone. Each can be used to identify the person that left them because they are as unique as we are. Although they may look similar, no two people will leave the same footprint. Just like our biological footprints are unique, each of us is forming a distinct carbon print on the environment. “A Carbon Footprint is a measure of the impact human activities have on the environment in terms of the amount of green house gases produced, measured in units of CO₂”.¹

Our carbon footprint is based on our everyday lifestyle choices such as our methods of travel, home energy usage, diet, and recycling habits. According to carbonfootprint.com, the average American household’s footprint is 20.4 tons of CO₂ (CO₂). Residents of the United States have a larger carbon footprint than any other country worldwide. If, in our quest for more fulfilling lives, we continue to grossly misuse our natural resources without taking proactive steps to conserve or replenish them, then generations to come will not know the joys of some of the simple luxuries we enjoy today.

Oil spills on the Alaskan coastline, snow in parts of Florida, increased cases of skin cancer and asthma, Los Angeles smog, all of these are lasting affects of our carbon footprint on the environment. It’s time for us to take a look at what steps we can take to reduce our carbon footprint and ensure that future generations don’t perish due to harmful environmental toxins. With that in mind, the Office of the People’s Counsel will help answer the question - **How can I Reduce my Carbon Footprint?**

I. What can you do to reduce your current footprint...

- ◆ **Travel** - automobiles produce over 20 percent of total carbon emission in the United States.² Walking, riding your bicycle, taking public transportation, or carpooling on some of the trips you make in a week will help in the reduction of CO₂ released into the atmosphere. Also, properly inflated tires can improve gas mileage by over 3 percent.³
- ◆ **Home Energy Usage** - the use of compact fluorescent light bulbs will save 100 pounds of carbon for each incandescent bulb it replaces.⁴ If every American household replaced one incandescent with a compact fluorescent, the impact would be similar to taking 7.5 million cars off of the road.⁵
- ◆ **Digital Thermostats** - will help save energy because consumers are able to program them to turn on and off at peak usage times. Also adjusting your

¹ www.carbonfootprint.com

² The Nature Conservancy, *Climate Change: What You Can Do Climate-Saving Trips from Nature Conservancy Scientist*, www.nature.org/initiatives/climatechange/activities/art19630.html.

³ *Ten Things to Do*, www.climatecrisis.net

⁴ See note 2.

⁵ Union of Concerned Scientists, *What’s Your Carbon Footprint?*, February 2006, www.ucsusa.org/publications/greentips/whats-your-carb.html?print=t.

thermostats 2 degrees either up or down can save thousands of pounds of carbon emissions.

- ◆ **Energy Star Products** – appliance that with the federal energy star labels use 10–50% less energy and water than standard models. If just one in 10 homes used ENERGY STAR qualified appliances, the change would be like planting 1.7 million new acres of trees.⁶
- ◆ **Green power** - many utilities are giving customers the option of utilizing renewable energy sources (solar, wind) for their home energy usage.

II. What proactive steps can you take to help correct any wrong carbon impressions that have been made?

- ◆ **Recycle** - you can help to reduce waste in landfills and recycling half of a household's waste can save 2400 pounds of CO2. Additionally, using products made with recycled materials will save our trees and other resources needed to produce new products.
- ◆ **Plant a tree** - trees absorb CO2 from the air for their energy source, and produces oxygen for us to breath.⁷
- ◆ **By local produce** - food grown on local farms minimizes transportation emissions because farmers don't have far to travel.⁸
- ◆ **Know your Carbon Footprint** - there are a number of websites consumers can visit to calculate their carbon footprint⁹:
 - www.carbonfootprint.com
 - www.epa.gov
 - www.climatecrisis.com

Reducing our carbon footprint is not simply a choice, but an obligation and responsibility for all of us to embrace. **What does your carbon footprint look like?**

⁶ http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=appliances.pr_appliances

⁷ See note 2.

⁸ See note 5.

⁹ "How to Shrink Your Carbon Footprint", *More Magazine*, October 2007.