

The Low-Carbon Lifestyle

Reducing the total carbon load on the atmosphere begins with choices individual consumers can make every day. Find out how much carbon you are personally responsible for by using a carbon footprint calculator. Then, trim off as you can in your daily life through energy-efficient lifestyle choices. Finally, go completely carbon-neutral by purchasing offsets for your remaining emissions from reputable organizations.



Photo Credit: Payton Chung



Photo credit: Ben Millett

Step 1: Calculate your carbon footprint

As with any diet, all the little things add up – a re-charger here, an incandescent bulb there, no one’s going to notice, right? Well, you might be surprised at how much carbon you personally emit. Try using one of these carbon calculators to get the big picture on your carbon footprint: The Safe Climate Calculator (<http://safeclimate.net/calculator/>), The Home Energy Saver (<http://hes.lbl.gov/>), and The Home Energy Checkup (<http://www.ase.org/section/homeenergycheckup/>).

Step 2: Practice energy efficiency

We all know about walking, biking, and public transit, or swapping out your conventional light bulbs for compact fluorescents. But did you know that you can save energy by insulating your water heater? Or that buying locally grown food means using less fossil fuels? Here are some tips from Audubon Magazine (http://audubonmagazine.org/features0609/pdf/GlobalWarming_pullout.pdf) on how to start your “low-carbon diet.”

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Step 3: Offset your remaining emissions

Emissions offsetting involves using or enhancing natural processes that trap carbon dioxide and “sink” it (take it out of the atmosphere by transforming it into solid carbon). Carbon sinks include forests, fens, and oceanic plankton. Planting trees and reforestation are some of the best long-term means of offsetting carbon emissions. You can purchase emissions offsets from companies and nonprofit organizations that plant the number of trees needed to offset a specific amount of emissions – say, the amount generated by your family’s round-trip vacation flight. There are many such companies that you can find over the internet. But, buyer beware – some of these companies are scams or involve questionable practices (such as bulldozing existing forests, ironically enough, to plant enough trees to fill the promised quota). Conduct some research about the companies you are interested in purchasing emissions offsets from in order to find out more about their business history.

Here are some companies that the Will Steger Foundation has researched and found to be reputable: Carbonfund.org (<http://www.carbonfund.org/site/>), Terrapass (<http://www.terrapass.com/>), and Native Energy (<http://www.nativeenergy.com/welcome.html>).

