

TIP SHEET: *Reducing Your Carbon Footprint*

Carbon emissions (also referred to as greenhouse gases) are generated by burning fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and natural gas. For the meeting industry, the primary sources of greenhouse gas emissions are travel to and

from the event, cooling and heating the venue and shipping of materials to and from the meeting site. Becoming “carbon neutral” simply means calculating total climate-damaging carbon emissions, reducing them where possible, and then balancing remaining emissions, often by purchasing a carbon offset.

Carbon Calculators

www.nativeenergy.com/businesses.html

www.cleanairconservancy.org/calculator.php

www.safeclimate.net/calculator

www.carbonfund.org

1. Baseline: figure out your “carbon footprint” To figure out the potential greenhouse gas emissions, start by estimating participant travel to and from the event, as well as potential emissions from heating and cooling the venue (ask the meeting site to provide data). There are a number of websites that have calculators to assist you with this process and can help you purchase carbon offsets for different aspects of the event. [See box]

2. Reduce: emit less greenhouse gases. Cutting down on travel is one of the best ways to minimize the carbon footprint of an event. This could mean choosing meeting locations closer to potential attendees and ensuring that sites are well served by public transportation. Selecting venues with strong energy efficiency programs and investigating lower carbon freight and delivery options are other steps that can be taken.

3. Sequester: take more greenhouse gases out of the atmosphere and store it somewhere. What can't be reduced can be offset by purchasing carbon offsets or by directly funding activities that sequester carbon or take it out of the atmosphere, such as planting trees or trapping methane from animal manure.

TIP SHEET: *Reducing Your Carbon Footprint*

4. Compare before you purchase: There are many sources of carbon offsets, so compare before you commit. Important considerations include: (a) how the carbon offset was generated (tree planting or renewable energy); (b) transparency (how well does the source ensure and document carbon savings); (c) and cost. Event planners that organize many events during a year may want to consider becoming a participating member of a carbon exchange, such as the Chicago Climate Exchange, so they have ready access to a pool of carbon credits that they can retire as needed.

5. Support: let participants know what you're doing. Hosting a carbon neutral event takes upfront time and planning, but attendees can help. To allay costs, you may consider charging participants an offset fee or asking for a donation towards the purchase of offset credits. You can also encourage participants to work with one of the commercial online travel companies that offer carbon offsets, shifting some of the cost to them. You can also recommend using freight and shipping companies that provide carbon offsets as part of their services.

Do Carbon Offsets Really Make a Difference? U.S. carbon dioxide emissions were almost 6 billion metric tons in 2005. Statistically speaking, an individual purchase of a few metric tons of carbon offsets does not make a difference. But when scaled up to the level of a large trade show or convention, the impact will be significant and does make a difference.

Source: *Abby Corso, Senior Director, the Delta Institute, a nonprofit that works for a cleaner environment, healthier communities and a greener economy. For more information, visit www.delta-institute.org.*