



SMALL BUSINESS & NONPROFIT CLINIC

Meredith Sharp

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What does it really mean to “go green”?

Saying you’re trying to “go green” or reduce your carbon footprint is a popular phrase these days. But what is a carbon footprint, and how do you make it smaller?

According to www.carbonfootprint.com, a carbon footprint is:

[A] measure of the impact our activities have on the environment, and in particular climate change. It relates to the amount of greenhouse gases produced in our day-to-day lives through burning fossil fuels for electricity, heating and transportation etc.

The amount of greenhouse gases we emit in our working lives can be affected by factors such as the amount of electricity or water we use; the amount of paper we go through; the volume and types of items we recycle; the methods by which we commute to work; and even the foods that we eat for lunch.

In general, implementing “green” practices means implementing practices designed to make your business more energy efficient, or reduce your carbon footprint. Fortunately, any changes you are able to implement for your business or nonprofit can have a positive impact on the planet. It can eventually lead to positive changes in your bottom line, too.

The basic mantra is to use less and think local. An easy practice to implement, for example, is paper management. Investing in a duplexer for your printer, or a printer that will print dual-sided documents, will require cash outlay at the beginning, but the upshot is that you can cut your paper needs by half. You can also purchase office paper that contains recycled content.

The Environmental Defense Fund's Paper Calculator, at <http://www.papercalculator.org>, provides a fascinating tool that displays what environmental impact your current paper needs have on the planet, and how it will change if you use recycled paper. For instance, 500 pounds of a typical copy paper with no recycled content uses about 6 trees' worth of wood per year and creates 4,769 gallons of wastewater, 570 tons of solid waste, and 1,423 lbs CO₂ equivalent of greenhouse gases. Simply switching to paper with 30 percent postconsumer recycled content saves two trees, 650 gallons of wastewater, 85 pounds of solid waste, and 200 pounds of greenhouse gases.

If you need more convincing, visit the GreenPrint web site (which contains data on resource use for paper) at <http://www.printgreener.com/earthday.html>.

In addition to using less paper in your office, you can also recycle office paper. If you work or operate your nonprofit out of your home, you may be able to recycle paper through your community's home recycling program, or drop off paper at your local recycling center. Check with your local waste authority or waste management provider to find out what services they offer and what items they recycle. If you operate a small business or nonprofit organization at a separate office, and would like to implement a recycling program, [paperrecycles.org](http://www.paperrecycles.org) has a good guide at http://www.paperrecycles.org/workplace_recycling/index.html.

Another way to reduce your carbon footprint is to seek alternative methods for getting to work. Taking the bus to work instead of driving uses less fuel and emits less carbon dioxide, as does riding a train or subway. Cycling or walking instead of taking motorized transport, however, uses no fuel, emits no pollution (other than the carbon dioxide you breathe out anyway), and is a great way to integrate exercise into your day.

Food is also a good place to implement "greener" practices. The more food you eat that is locally produced, the fewer miles on the road (and fewer pollutants in the air) will be traveled by trucks, trains or planes getting your meal from the farm to your table. Some easy ways to integrate "local eating" into your life include reducing the amount of meat you eat, or visiting local farmer's markets to pick up local produce.

If you are thinking about going green by making your business or nonprofit organization more environmentally responsible – whether it's for your customers or your bottom line – you can easily make a positive impact, even if you start small.