Reducing Your Carbon Footprint

Each year, every person in the United States adds about 36,000 pounds of carbon dioxide equivalents to the atmosphere. Suppose you want to shrink your carbon footprint by 10%, a reasonable goal. To accomplish this, you’ll need to make changes that remove 3,600 pounds of carbon dioxide equivalents from your carbon footprint annually.

So, what changes do you make? The following activities or products each contribute about 1 pound of carbon dioxide equivalents to the atmosphere. What can you do?

One pound of carbon dioxide corresponds to:

Electricity — one pound of carbon dioxide corresponds to approximately 1.1 kW-hr of electricity, enough for:

- 12 minutes of electric clothes dryer use
- 11 hours of TV use (HDTV)
- 18 hours of running a 60 W incandescent bulb
- 120 hours of running a 60 W-equivalent LED bulb (typically ~9 W)
- 340 hours of laptop use

Travel — one pound of carbon dioxide will get you:

- 1.0 mile in a large gas-powered car (driving alone)
- 1.1 miles on a domestic flight (per passenger)
- 1.5 miles in a mid-size gas-powered car (driving alone)
- 1.8 miles in a small gas-powered car (driving alone)
- 2.1 miles in a large hybrid car (driving alone)
- 2.6 miles in a mid-size hybrid car (driving alone)
- 2.7 miles on a bus (per passenger)
- 8.0 miles on a light-rail train (per passenger)

Heating and cooling — one pound of carbon dioxide buys you:

- 2 minutes of a hot shower
- 6 minutes of heating with a gas forced air furnace
- 15 minutes of air conditioning

Food and beverages — it takes one pound of carbon dioxide to produce and deliver to you:

- 0.017 pounds of beef (0.27 ounces)
- 0.048 pounds of cheese (0.76 ounces)
- 0.059 pounds of coffee (0.94 ounces)
- 0.14 pounds of pork (2.2 ounces)
- 0.17 pounds of poultry (2.7 ounces)
• 0.25 pounds of rice
• 0.71 pounds of wheat
• 1.1 pounds of peas
• 1.4 pounds of bananas
• 2.5 pounds of root vegetables

Consumer goods — producing and delivering goods costs energy, which means carbon in the atmosphere. One pound of carbon dioxide gets you:
• 1/375 of a laptop
• 1/125 of a smartphone
• 1/100 of a pair of boots
• 1/50 of a lightweight jacket
• 1/45 of a pair of blue jeans
• 1/25 of a pair of flip-flops
• 1/10 of a cotton t-shirt