

CARING FOR CREATION: GOOD EARTHKEEPING IDEA #7

Go Carbon Neutral

WHAT: *Strive to make your lifestyle carbon neutral*

The average American contributes 19 tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere each year, compared with the world average of 4 tons. Carbon dioxide is the major greenhouse gas fueling global warming. Unfortunately, the United States has not taken firm measures to reduce its disproportionate contribution to the global warming problem. It is unjust that those least responsible for the global warming problem—the poor of the world, will suffer the most. There are many tools at our disposal to act. Although, individual action alone is not enough, it is an important first step and a valuable learning process.

WHY: *Each of us has a moral responsibility to reduce our carbon footprint.*

The 2006 General Assembly passed a resolution on urging Presbyterians to go carbon neutral. Below are some highlights.

- Finds that the Christian mandate to care for creation and the biblical promise of the restoration of right relationships between God, human beings, and the rest of creation impels and inspires us to act to reduce our energy usage;
- Finds that the urgency, injustice, and seriousness of this issue calls us as Christians to act NOW and to act boldly to lead the way in reducing our energy usage;
- Strongly urges all Presbyterians to immediately make a bold witness by aspiring to live carbon neutral lives.

Case Study: Eco-Justice Team Makes Travel Carbon Neutral

Like many teams in the Presbytery of the Cascades, members come from throughout the state. To reduce the environmental footprint of the travel, the Eco-Justice team carools and uses conference calls for some meetings. The Eco-Justice team purchases a green tag from Bonneville Environmental Foundation to offset the emissions from its travel from Bonneville Environmental Foundation. The cost to offset emissions is only \$40 for the average year.

HOW: There are three basic steps to go climate neutral:

1. Determine your carbon footprint.

- Use a web-based calculator to determine how much carbon your lifestyle is responsible for.
- Go to www.CarbonCounter.org for a highly simplified calculator or a more in-depth calculator, www.empowermentinstitute.net. See where you stand compared to other Americans and people and other countries at www.safeclimate.net.

2. Reduce your energy use and purchase renewable energy from your utility.

- Start by changing out incandescent bulbs from four of your most frequently used lights with compact fluorescents. See Good Earthkeeping Idea Sheet #6 “Conserve Energy” and websites on the back of this page for energy conservation and efficiency ideas.
- Purchase locally produced goods and foodstuffs to reduce energy use for transportation.

3. Offset your remaining carbon emissions by purchasing carbon offsets as you are able.

- A **carbon offset** is a mechanism by which the impact of emitting a ton of CO₂ can be cancelled out by avoiding the release of a ton elsewhere, or absorbing a ton of CO₂ from the air that otherwise would have remained in the atmosphere. Green Tags / Renewable Energy Certificates are one many strategies for offsetting; others include tree planting.
- A **green tag or Renewable Energy Certificate (REC)** is an authorized document that represents the environmental benefits associated with renewable energy.
- The carbon offset market is still fairly young and is not regulated. Check to see if the offsets you are considering are third-party certified by an organization such as Green-e, www.green-e.org.
- Airline flights contribute significantly to global warming. Reduce your air travel by taking the train, where possible, for shorter trips. Purchase carbon offsets for the emissions from your flights.

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Support and information resources

General

Presbyterians for Restoring Creation. For a brochure on going carbon neutral, a full copy of the GA resolution and to learn what Presbyterians are doing to go carbon neutral at www.prcweb.org.

Low Carbon Diet. A valuable small group workbook resource for congregations. This workbook outlines actions that are easy to take and have a CO2 reduction value assigned to them. To order or use an online version of the workbook go to www.empowermentinstitute.net.

Carbon Calculators and Offset Providers:

Bonneville Environmental Foundation. www.b-e-f.org Based in Oregon, BEF provides Green Tags to offset carbon emissions from households and businesses. Strong focus on renewable energy in the Northwest.

Climate Trust. www.CarbonCounter.org This Oregon-based organization provides offsets through energy efficiency, renewable energy, cogeneration, transportation efficiency and reforestation projects.

Native Energy. www.nativeenergy.com Builds renewable energy projects that create sustainable economic benefits for Native Americans and Alaska Native Villages, and that help family farmers.

World Wildlife Fund. www.safeclimate.net. SafeClimate for Business details all the necessary steps for taking action on climate change, as well as additional information and resources to help businesses formulate a climate strategy. SafeClimate also offers a climate calculator for individuals.

Congregational Carbon Counter. The first carbon calculator designed to help a congregation go carbon neutral. www.emoregon.org/oregon_interfaith_power_and_light.htm. (In April)

Energy Efficiency:

Energy Trust of Oregon. This is an independent, public purpose organization dedicated to sustainable energy efficiency and renewable energy generation. It provides energy efficiency programs and renewable energy programs to customers of Portland General Electric, Pacific Power and Light, Cascade Natural Gas and NW Natural. 1-866-ENTRUST. www.energytrust.org

Energy Star. Helps businesses and individuals protect the environment through superior energy efficiency products and home and business improvement. 1-(888) STAR YES, (503) 595-4490. <http://www.energystar.gov>

Oregon Department of Energy. Information about renewable energy, energy efficiency, energy loan program and Oregon's energy tax credit programs. 1-800-221-8035. www.energy.state.or.us

Oregon Interfaith Power and Light. Empowers congregations and their members to conserve energy and invest in clean renewable energy; also offers educational and consulting services, discounted energy efficiency products, Energy Stewardship Covenant and information resources. www.emoregon.org/oregon_interfaith_power_and_light.htm. For California go to www.interfaithpower.org.

Renewable Power Utility Programs: Oregon's two major investor owned utilities are required by law to offer renewable power to their customers. You can sign up for renewable power with PacificCorp at www.pacificcorp.com and Portland General Electric at www.portlandgeneral.com. If you are a customer of a public utility, go to Renewable Northwest Project www.rnp.org to see if your utility offers a renewable energy option, or purchase a carbon offset for electricity.

Case Study: Kentucky Congregation Leads the Way in Helping Members Go Carbon Neutral

Earth Care Ministries of Second Presbyterian, Lexington KY is helping its members go carbon neutral through education and communications strategy and a covenant. The congregation has planned a series of classes on energy and carbon neutrality and is placing regular items on energy and global warming in its bulletins and newsletters. Excerpts of the covenant are below.

“in all humility, calling on our pastors, congregations, and denominational leaders for help in this faith journey, and trusting in the grace of God to assist us, we join in this solemn vow and covenant, committing to this bold witness, aspiring to live carbon neutral lives.*

I solemnly vow, and covenant with my Creator, this day

to analyze, monitor, and modify my use of carbon fuels,

a. reducing my use of fossil carbon fuels in the heating, cooling, and lighting of my home,

b. increasing my use of locally grown and organic food,

c. decreasing my use of meat especially that grown in concentrated animal feeding operations,

d. decreasing my use of fossil carbon fuels in transportation, eliminating some trips, seeking fuel efficiency, sharing rides, using public transport, walking, cycling,

e. and, when I have cut as much as I am now able, purchasing Carbon Offsets as I am able.