

Reduce Your Carbon Footprint!

The carbon footprint is a useful metric to use when analyzing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This concept provides a simplistic method for summarizing the many ways we personally contribute to the production of GHG. The number of GHG emission sources make the idea of calculating our individual contributions to GHG emissions seem very daunting. However, the carbon footprint provides a measure of GHG emissions in one easy-to-interpret number, often in the form of pounds of carbon dioxide (CO₂).

We used the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency calculator to determine carbon footprint, which is available at [this site](#). These types of calculators provide the very useful function of identifying the reduction of GHG emissions based on changing single actions.

Our Challenge: determine your current carbon footprint and then make a plan for reducing that number! The results could be greater than you expect (see the example below)!

1. **Heating & Electricity Usage.** There are a variety of activities around the house that can make a significant change in carbon footprint. As an example (using a Bethesda area code, 3 person household and 1000 kWh electricity usage per month), reducing air conditioning by 1 degree in the summer can prevent 102 lbs of CO₂ emissions.¹ While that equals only a slight savings in your electric bill, the reduction in GHG emissions is the same as planting a tree!¹ A similar impact can also be created by replacing just 3 traditional incandescent light bulbs with an EnergyStar option!
2. **Transportation.** Travel is one of the largest contributors to our carbon footprint. However, even small changes to our routine can make a large, long-term impact. Assuming the national average for fuel economy (22 mpg), reducing your travel by 110 miles is equivalent to planting a tree!¹ That could be as little as a few trips to work! An easy method to reduce travel mileage is to consolidate multiple trips into a single trip. For trips to work, consider using a car pool, teleworking or public transportation to achieve this goal.
3. **Recycling.** The GHG emissions from recycling a material are generally much less than those for mining or manufacturing new materials. For example, the energy required to produce a ton of aluminum is 96% less when using recycled material.² Recycling only your steel and aluminum cans over the course of a year is equivalent to planting 3 trees!¹ This is another easy method for reducing our carbon footprint!

I hope everyone will spend a few minutes to calculate their carbon footprint and identify a few ways they can make a positive change. Start reducing your carbon footprint today!