

Use a Carbon Footprint Calculator to Save Money and Save the Planet

By Walt Wojcik, GROW Commissioner



Various activities create carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gases that trap the sun's warming rays increasing air and water temperatures. For example, the amount of energy needed to commute, to heat or cool one's home, to grow the food one eats and to manufacture items that are bought all create harmful greenhouse gases. On average, Americans emit more CO₂ than the rest of the world (Table¹). In the USA, most of the energy comes from the burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil and natural gas) which pollutes the air and water.

Table¹

Country	CO ₂ billion tons total/2022	CO ₂ tons in 2022/person
China	12.7	9
USA	4.9	14
India	2.7	2
Russia	1.9	13

You can save money and help prevent further global warming! Knowing where your emissions come from can be determined by using a carbon footprint calculator. I recommend using either the Nature Conservancy Carbon Footprint Calculator ² or CoolClimate³. To calculate your carbon footprint, you will need your electric, water, and natural gas bills plus other information. These carbon footprint calculators provide estimated tons of CO₂ emitted per year by your household overall and in five subcategories: Travel, Home, Food, Goods, and Service. For these last three subcategories, my household's carbon footprint was not very high. (The Food subcategory may be high if one consumes a lot of beef and lamb.⁴ When I looked at my carbon footprint before driving two electric vehicles (EVs), my previous two gas-powered cars contributed about 12 tons of CO₂ per year. I saved almost \$2,000 per year by NOT buying gasoline or having oil changes. This savings took into account the higher electric bills from charging EVs at home. Because my household switched our electricity to energy from wind farms, our driving two EVs reduced our overall carbon footprint by about 27%.

When re-calculating my carbon footprint, the highest emission of CO₂ of about 9 tons/year comes from my house. Various ways to reduce CO₂ emissions for my home include: adjusting the thermostat down in winter and up in summer, better insulating the attic, replacing leaky windows, and replacing our gas stove, water heater, and furnace with electric appliances. Lately, I have learned that natural gas is NOT as good for the environment as I once thought. ^{5, 6}

All actions to reduce CO₂ and other greenhouse gases will subsequently reduce global temperatures but with varying degrees. The **most profound lowering** of future temperature occurs with **near complete elimination** of the use of coal, oil, and natural gas.⁷ Realistically, this will not happen

overnight. Does it need to happen? The truthful answer is YES and the sooner the better. Renewable electricity from clean solar and wind is available and you can reduce your carbon footprint now.

In conclusion, as a fellow resident of Westchester, I ask that you calculate your carbon footprint and see where you can reduce your carbon emissions. There is no one simple or easy fix to the problem of global warming. My philosophy has been to reduce my major carbon emitting problems. Remember that whatever step(s) taken, **you often will save money over time. By reducing your carbon footprint, you create a cleaner and healthier world for you, your children, and your neighbors.** If everyone does their part, the consequence will be meaningful. I dream of living in a world with clean energy, air and water. A world where all can live a good and healthy life.

References

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Walt Wojcik obtained his PhD in pharmacology with scientific training at the U of I Med Center in Chicago and later at the National Institute of Health in Washington DC. Afterward, he was Chief of a research lab at Georgetown U. in Washington DC while faculty in the medical school. Later, he received his MD at University of Maryland and then trained in neurology at U of Chicago Hospitals. He was a neurologist at MacNeal Hospital in Berwyn and then, faculty at Loyola U before recently retiring.

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September 21-22, 2024