

# OFFSET YOUR CARBON FOOTPRINT

Offsetting your carbon footprint allows you to become part of the solution to climate change. By purchasing carbon offsets (also called “green tags” or “renewable energy certificates”), you fund a reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions equal to the emissions your activities have generated. (In addition to purchasing these credits, it is also important to reduce your energy use through conservation and greater efficiency.) The money you provide typically funds alternative energy projects that would otherwise lack the necessary capital for construction. By directing your offset dollars to these projects, you can help finance new wind farms, solar arrays, farm and landfill methane projects, sustainable or “clean” development projects in developing countries, and more.

The first step to reducing your net climate impact is to calculate how many tons of GHGs you directly emit or cause to be generated by your activities. Individuals and households can use an online calculator such as the ones offered by Carbonfund.org or NativeEnergy.com to calculate their carbon footprint. Organizations that want to determine how large their footprints are typically work directly with expert staff at Carbonfund.org or NativeEnergy.com due to the complexity of the task. Once you know how many tons of GHGs you’re adding to the atmosphere, select an offset that will reduce your GHGs by the same amount.

## What to Look For in Carbon Offsets

The market in carbon offsets has grown rapidly, and standards for the industry are still evolving. Co-op America offers a few general guidelines for selecting a high-quality carbon offset. It suggests that you look for:

- offsets that support specific projects – don’t settle for a vague claim
- offsets that will cause carbon reductions that would not otherwise occur
- offsets whose GHG reductions will happen on a clear timeframe
- offset providers that ensure your offset can not be resold
- offset providers that are independently verified

It also recommends that you:

- Avoid offsets based on tree-planting projects
- Avoid offsets that purchase “allowances” on a climate exchange

## Useful websites

NativeEnergy: [www.nativeenergy.com](http://www.nativeenergy.com)

Co-op America: [www.coopamerica.org](http://www.coopamerica.org)

Carbon Fund: [www.Carbonfund.org](http://www.Carbonfund.org)

Information brought to you by the Virginia Sustainable Building Network.

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