

Carbon Neutrality - A Beginner's Guide

What does it mean if you claim to be Carbon Neutral?

Carbon Neutral means you have reduced your CO₂ output by as much as possible and then paid an offset provider to take responsibility for your remaining unavoidable emissions. The offset provider uses your money to fund a program which either sequesters (absorbs) an amount of CO₂ from the atmosphere equal to your remaining emissions or introduces energy efficiency measures elsewhere which reduce the amount of CO₂ that would otherwise have been sent into the atmosphere. The cost of such measures would be covered by you on a \$ / tonne of CO₂ basis.

Are all Carbon Neutral claims the same?

No, just claiming to be Carbon Neutral means very little. Carbon Neutral claims need to be qualified. For example "Our organization is Carbon Neutral for all emissions relating to direct energy use and business related travel".

Who sets the rules for Carbon Neutrality?

Guidelines for determining responsibility for emissions are contained within the GHG Protocol. This document is published by the World Business Council for Sustainable Energy and has been accepted by most institutions currently involved with emissions monitoring.

Why do we have to reduce our emissions before paying for offsets?

All offsets have secondary effects. Many require the use of land for planting trees or bio fuel crops. This land may otherwise have been used for agriculture or housing. Energy efficiency measures are often limited by once off technological implementations where further improvements will cost more in terms of resources and money. In other words, our ability to provide offsets into the future, is limited by the availability of the same resources we require to provide for our standards of living.

Are all offsets the same? No, some are more sustainable than others and some classes of offset are more closely audited for efficacy and accountability than others. For a extensive summary of what is available please see the following website from Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology's Centre for Global Sustainability. <http://www.carbonoffsetguide.com.au/>