

## **Offset Your Footprint**

**By Paul Tick**

**Two families I know are concerned about the amount of energy they use in their daily routines and the resulting greenhouse gas emitted by their actions. The impact each of us have on the environment is referred to as our "carbon footprint." These families decided to spend a little extra money each month to attempt to neutralize their footprint. They purchased something called "carbon offsets." Offsets are when we, the consumer, pay a third party to remove a quantity of carbon from the air to balance the carbon pollution we put into it. Different offsets are offered by different offset companies. Some use our money to plant trees, some use it to burn methane from animal manure and landfills and some build solar and wind power. It would cost the average driver only \$1.50 per month to offset their car use.**

**Some giant corporations such as Travelocity and Expedia offer offsets for customers' travel arranged through them. By purchasing offsets, the 2005 film "Syriana" was the first carbon-neutral movie and in 2006, "An Inconvenient Truth" became the first carbon-neutral documentary. Whole Foods Market offsets all of its almost 200 stores through the purchase of wind power. Goggle, the Superbowl, the Academy Awards and other are offsetting all or at least some of their footprint.**

**While offsets are an important effort and should ideally be done by most of us, there is no current way to ensure that your offset company is actually doing what it promises. Your money may go to purchase methane gas but this is actually a more potent greenhouse gas than CO<sub>2</sub>. Your company may plant trees but there is no guarantee that the company will use it for that purpose, that the company will plant anymore trees because of the few dollars that you gave it or that the tree will be planted in an area where they are most needed. Some environmentalists worry that when people buy offsets they may think they no longer have to change their polluting habits.**

**To fix these problems, some organizations such as Clean Air-Cool Planet are creating monitoring and rating systems. Organizations like this are attempting to bring some standard measuring for the effectiveness of companies offering offsets. They look at where our money goes and for what purpose, the history of the offset company and how open the company is about its use of our money.**

**While acknowledging some problems with some offsetting companies, the Sierra Club thinks that good quality offsets are a useful educational tool. They see offsets as helping people think about their personal responsibility for greenhouse gasses and giving them a way to take a concrete step to make for the environment. Many of their group trips offer offsets.**

**At the very least, we see that more and more people are becoming aware that each of us has a carbon footprint and that global warming is a serious, if not the most serious issue facing human kind. Even if some of these efforts are not all they might seem to**

be, more and more people are making an effort to do something about their impact on the earth and more standards are being adopted for offsets.

So what is a concerned co-opper to do? Let's make it simple. First, reduce your carbon footprint by buying local, driving a small car and driving as little as possible, using compact fluorescent light bulbs, shutting lights and computers behind you, shoveling snow instead of snow blowing, using push or electric lawn mowers rather than a gas powered ones and by allowing your lawns to grow as much as possible, etc. Go to the website below; calculate your carbon footprint and sign up for a respected offset. Always vote for candidates who support the environment and shop at stores that do their share.

Calculate your footprint/get offsets: <http://coopcoffees.com/resources/get-involved/go-green/the-very-best-of-best-practices>

References:

[www.ecobusinesslinks.com/carbon\\_offset\\_wind\\_credits\\_carbon\\_reduction.htm](http://www.ecobusinesslinks.com/carbon_offset_wind_credits_carbon_reduction.htm)

<http://www.cleanair-coolplanet.org/>

<http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2006/05/26/offsets/>

[www.csmonitor.com/2007/0110/p13s02-sten.html](http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0110/p13s02-sten.html)

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/09/business/09offsets.html>