

Guide to Carbon Footprint Calculators Key Terms

Learn what it means to leave a smaller carbon footprint

By Kathryn Keep

Everyone leaves a [carbon footprint](#) caused by daily living and working, which takes its toll on the Earth. Measuring a business or person's impact on the environment is the first step to making greener choices. Offsetting your carbon footprint may be easier than you think. Whether it's supporting green energy or increasing your vehicle's fuel efficiency, a few simple choices can lead to a more sustainable future. You may even wish to calculate your footprint to gain further perspective on environmental impact

Action Steps

The best contacts and resources to help you get it done

CARBON FOOTPRINT

A carbon footprint is a measurement of the amount of greenhouse gas emissions you, your household or your business produce. Scientists usually measure carbon footprints in metric tons of carbon dioxide produced per year.

I recommend: [The Nature Conservancy](#) offers a simple carbon footprint calculator to help you become more aware of how much various activities impact the environment. [Carbon Footprint](#) has online calculators for businesses and households, and it suggests resources for reducing your impact.

GREENHOUSE GASES

Greenhouse gases trap heat in the Earth's atmosphere. One way people produce them is by burning fossil fuels for energy. The most common greenhouse gas is carbon dioxide, or CO₂, but there are many others, such as methane.

I recommend: The [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#) has a detailed breakdown of individual greenhouse gases.

CARBON OFFSETS

Carbon offsets are those actions that offset your carbon dioxide emissions, such as investing in renewable energy, protecting forest land or driving your car less.

I recommend: [NativeEnergy](#) helps you calculate carbon offsets for your home or business.

GREEN POWER

Green power refers to electricity produced by renewable energy sources, such as wind, solar, geothermal or hydropower.

I recommend: The [U.S. Department of Energy Green Power Network](#) provides information on these technologies and connects consumers with opportunities to buy green power.

FUEL ECONOMY

Different types of cars and different drivers get differing levels of fuel economy. You may be surprised to learn how simple measures like properly inflated tires can substantially affect fuel economy. People usually measure fuel economy in terms of miles per gallon (MPG).

I recommend: Read more about the importance of fuel economy and how you can maximize yours at the [U.S. Department of Energy](#).

ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT

Another way of calculating your impact on the environment is to calculate an ecological footprint. An ecological footprint gives an idea of the amount of land that various lifestyle choices use.

I recommend: Check out the footprint calculator at [Global Footprint Network](#) to learn how much land is needed to support your lifestyle.