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INSPIRING SUSTAINABILITY
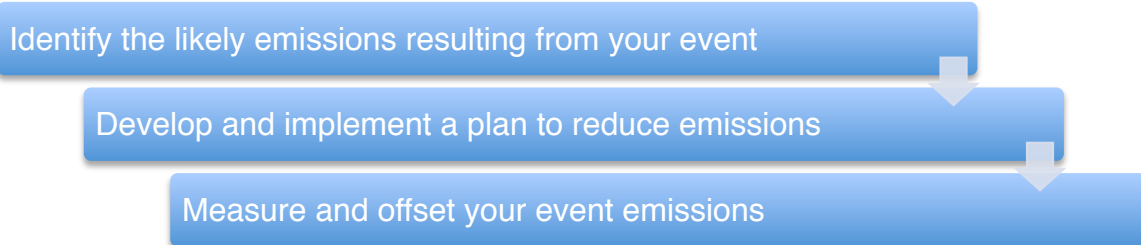GREEN MEETING INDUSTRY COUNCIL

Shrinking Your Event's
Carbon Footprint
Resources from the Convention Industry Council

CO2

Tread Lightly: Shrinking Your Event's Carbon Footprint

Meetings and events can be major sources of greenhouse gas emissions. These emissions can stem from transportation, energy use, food choices and materials. Fortunately, there are many ways to reduce emissions and shrink your event's carbon footprint by following this simple roadmap:

- Identify the likely emissions resulting from your event
- Develop and implement a plan to reduce emissions
- Measure and offset your event emissions

Step 1: Identify the likely emissions resulting from your event

The first step towards reducing your footprint is to identify where you expect to have greenhouse gas emissions. Common sources for events include:

- Transportation of attendees and materials
- Energy use in venues and hotels, including heating and air conditioning
- Menu items

Step 2: Develop and implement a plan to reduce emissions

Once you know they types of emissions related to your event, you can develop a plan to reduce them. Below are some easy tips to get you started:

- Choose venues with energy conservation practices, such as LEED certified buildings
- Minimize the need for onsite transportation by booking accommodation and venues within walking distance of each other
- Select a destination with good air lift, access by trains, or close proximity to the majority of your attendees
- Book electric or alternative-fuel vehicles for attendee shuttles, or encourage the use of public transit where practical
- Choose lower carbon menu choices such vegetarian, chicken or fish and seasonal, local produce. If you are selecting beef or dairy items for menus, consider smaller portion sizes and have a food waste minimization plan
- Produce materials locally to reduce shipping needs
- Turn off audio visual equipment when not in use, and request energy efficient equipment
- Weather permitting, ask for vehicles such as shuttles and delivery trucks to be turned off when not in use
- Adjust room temperatures to reduce the need for heating or air conditioning
- Use technology, such as mobile apps, to reduce the need for printing and shipping
- Schedule local events at off-peak hours to reduce attendees driving in congested rush hour traffic
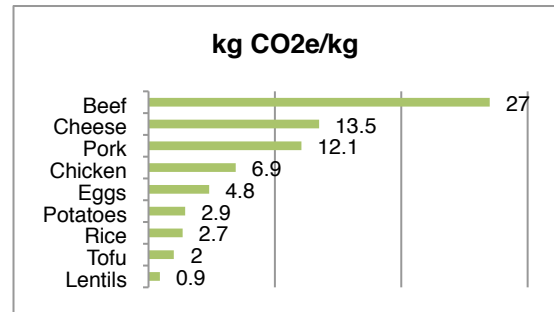- Compost organic waste to avoid landfill-related greenhouse gas emissions

A note about food choices and carbon emissions…

As seen in the following graph, the carbon footprint of different food choices vary tremendously.[1]

Graph #1: Carbon Footprint of Food Items (shown as kilograms of carbon dioxide equivalents per kilogram of food)

kg CO2e/kg

Food	kg CO2e/kg
Beef	27
Cheese	13.5
Pork	12.1
Chicken	6.9
Eggs	4.8
Potatoes	2.9
Rice	2.7
Tofu	2
Lentils	0.9

A few tips to help you lower your menu carbon footprint:

✓ **Reduce the amount of meat and dairy served at your events.** This could be as simple as reducing portion sizes, opting for one meatless meal per day, or participating in Meatless Monday.
✓ **Choose local.** This is especially important for items that would otherwise be air-freighted or transported in refrigerated vehicles (note that 83% of the average U.S. household's carbon footprint for food comes from growing and producing it, while transportation represents only 11%.[2]). Each of these will have higher travel related carbon-emissions. Choosing local food is also good for the local economy, is usually fresher and helps to create a sense of place.
✓ **Choose seasonal.** Food grown in a field will typically have lower carbon emissions than those grown in heated greenhouses.

Step 3: Measure and offset your event emissions

According to the David Suzuki Foundation, a carbon offset is a credit for greenhouse gas reductions achieved by one party that can be purchased and used to compensate (offset) the emissions of another party.[3] By using carbon offsets, events can take responsibility for their carbon emissions. While reduction of emissions should be the main priority, the use of offsets can be a positive step towards carbon neutral events. Before the emissions can be offset, events need to be able to measure their impact. Some practical ways of doing this include:

▪ Request energy usage reports from your venues. Ideally, this will be requested as part of your RFP process. Some hotels are starting to use the Hotel Carbon Measurement Index (HCMI), a free tool developed by the International Tourism Partnership (ITP) and the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). The HCMI can be used to generate reports per occupied room, on a daily basis, and; per area of meeting space, on an hourly basis. The HCMI is available from http://tourismpartnership.org/carbon-emissions/#.
▪ If energy usage reports are not available, energy use can be estimated using event carbon emission calculators such as the one from www.terrapass.com
▪ Calculate travel related emissions for your attendees by using a flight or car calculator such as the one from www.offfsetters.ca

[1] Full Lifecycle Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Common Proteins and Vegetables were sourced from: http://www.ewg.org/meateatersguide/a-meat-eaters-guide-to-climate-change-health-what-you-eat-matters/climate-and-environmental-impacts/
[2] Andrew Winston, HBR Blog Network Local Food or Less Meat? Data Tells The Real Story http://blogs.hbr.org/winston/2011/06/local-food-or-less-meat-data-t.html Quoting: Christopher L. Weber and H. Scott Matthews, Food-Miles and the Relative Climate Impacts of Food Choices in the United States, Environ. Sci. Technol., 2008, 42 (10), pp 3508–3513
[3] David Suzuki Foundation, Carbon Offsets http://www.davidsuzuki.org/issues/climate-change/science/climate-change-basics/carbon-offsets/

A note about selecting offsets…

Not all offsets are created equal. Here are a few things you should look for in selecting offsets:

- **Additionality:** Carbon offsets should be used to fund projects that otherwise wouldn't have occurred to result in net positive benefits for the environment. As an example, funding the installation of solar panels for a greenhouse that otherwise wouldn't have been feasible without the investment would be considered additional. Carbon offsets should not be used to fund projects that are required by government regulation, as these would not be considered additional.

- **Project Type:** Offsets that support renewable energy (such as wind or solar) reduce our use of fossil fuels and can have long-term benefits. Forestry related projects, such as tree-planting or protecting an area from logging can be problematic as it can take several years for the trees to reach their potential for carbon storage, are at risk from forest fires, and can result in logging simply moving to another area. For a comprehensive review of pros and cons of various carbon offset project types, see *Purchasing Carbon Offsets: A Guide for Canadian Consumers, Businesses, and Organizations* available from: http://www.davidsuzuki.org/publications/resources/2009/purchasing-carbon-offsets/

- **Certification:** Look for offsets that have been verified by a third-party. Examples include The Gold Standard: www.goldstandard.org, VCS: www.v-c-s.org and Green-e: www.green-e.org.

- **Offsets vs. Renewable Energy Certificates:** Both carbon offsets and renewable energy certificates (RECs, also known as renewable energy credits, green tags or green certificates) are tools to help us to improve environmental impact, though they represent different ways of doing so. Carbon offsets address greenhouse gas emission reductions, as measured in tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents (CO2e) while RECs represent electricity production, as measured in MWh of electricity produced from renewable energy resources.

A note about scope…

When looking to reduce your event's carbon emissions, you'll want to define the scope that you will include. The Greenhouse Gas Protocol has established three categories of emissions, Scope 1, 2 and 3. Here is how each relates to the events industry:

Scope 1	Scope 2	Scope 3
• From sources owned and controlled by the organization, such as company owned vehicles	• From emissions from the consumption of purchased sources of energy, such as electricity used in a venue	• From indirect sources of emissions, such as attendee travel

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