



GUIDE TO GOING CARBON NEUTRAL

This Guide was prepared for families and churches in Response to the General Assembly 2006 Resolution Calling on all Presbyterians to go Carbon Neutral as a Bold Christian Witness to Help Combat the Effects of Climate Change.

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For more information see
www.pcusa.org/acswp/pdf/carbon-neutrality.pdf

Guide Outline

WHAT: Definition of carbon neutral
General Assembly Resolution

WHY: Background information on need to go
carbon neutral

HOW: Steps for families to go carbon neutral
Steps for churches to go carbon neutral
Costs/Benefits

What does it mean to go carbon neutral?

“New Oxford Dictionary 2006 Word of the Year”

Carbon neutrality requires our energy consumption that releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere be reduced and carbon offsets purchased to compensate for those carbon emissions that could not be eliminated.

What does the GA 2006 Resolution say?

It strongly urges all Presbyterians immediately to make a bold witness by aspiring to live carbon neutral lives.

It directs the General Assembly Council...to inform all Presbyterians, governing bodies, and churches of the urgent need for them to reduce their energy consumption and of the injustice of our current energy practices.

And, calls upon all Presbyterians to take this seriously, to pray asking for God's forgiveness and guidance, to study this issue, to calculate their carbon emissions, to educate others, and to use less energy, striving to make their lives carbon neutral.

(The journal, Church & Society (July-August, 2006) carries the Assembly's action.)

Why go carbon neutral?

It is the consensus of the scientific community that our burning of fossil fuels, like coal, oil and natural gas, emit greenhouses gases which are warming the planet and causing serious harm to the natural and manmade environment. (This is commonly called global warming).

It is accelerating faster than predicted just a few years ago and causing and contributing to:

- Ice sheet and glacial melting at alarming rates;
- Rising sea levels that, by the end of this century, will encroach on many of the world's coastal communities and lands where more than half of the world's population currently resides;
- A 30 percent weakening of the Gulf Stream in the last twelve years;
- Episodic coral reef die-off worldwide threatening traditional fisheries, a major food source for many;
- Island nations, such as Tuvalu, to seek refuge in other countries for their entire populations due to sea level rise;
- Water shortages and severe droughts in Africa;
- Record number of killer storms worldwide, leaving more than a thousand people dead and 3,500 missing as of April 2006 from Hurricane Katrina alone, and billions of dollars of damage in multiple states;
- A violation of the rights of entire populations, such as the Alaskan Inuit, to maintain their traditional culture of hunting and fishing on which their lives depend;
- Hundreds of species to face extinction—from Arctic polar bears to tropical tree frogs—due to habitat changes.

Carbon emissions already exceed a safe level according to a recent report and scientists now suggest that we have perhaps only a decade's grace period to reduce our energy usage before these devastating effects start to become irreversible.

We Americans are champion energy consumers, using 40 percent of the world's oil and emitting 25 percent of the world's greenhouse gases, even though we are less than 5 percent of the world's population.

We have the knowledge, skills, and resources to reduce our energy consumption and switch to alternative energy sources that are less harmful to the environment.

Prompt action and leadership by individuals, organizations, communities, states, and countries can keep global climate change from becoming much worse.

Previous General Assemblies (1981, 1998, 1999, and 2003) passed overtures, resolutions, and policies

addressing our unjust energy practices, calling us to develop frugal lifestyles reducing our energy consumption; and urging the United States to sign the Kyoto Treaty and to lead in reducing carbon emissions to combat global warming.

A recent Presbyterian Panel survey indicates that majorities of us believe our energy consumption contributes to global climate change; most agree that energy conservation reflects values of the Christian Reformed faith. Yet less than 50 percent of us have taken even the simplest steps to reduce our energy consumption.

How do you go carbon neutral?

Three steps to go carbon neutral:

1. Calculate your carbon emissions. Use your Internet search engine to find a suitable carbon calculator. Calculators can be found at www.nativeenergy.com, www.co2.org or www.safeclimate.net/calculator.

1. Reduce your carbon emissions as low as possible, aiming for the world average of 4 tons per person per year. To do this, reduce your energy usage. Remember it is your energy usage that release carbon emissions. Energy saving tips are available on the Internet and you are familiar with the most common ones such as installing compact fluorescent light bulbs, driving less, unplugging computers and other electronics when not in use, raising and lowering your thermostat seasonally, etc. One source of energy saving tips is found at <http://www.epa.gov/earthday/tips-saveenergy.htm>.

3. Offset your remaining carbon emissions, by purchasing carbon offsets. Carbon offset companies, such as Native Energy, Climate Care, Climate Friendly and many more sell carbon offsets by the ton. The money you pay the offset company is used to fund an alternative energy project that without

your money and that of others purchasing carbon offsets, would not be constructed. Two examples are the construction of windmills and methane digesters on dairy farms. These projects either don't emit carbon emissions or remove carbon emissions that normally would go into the atmosphere and contribute to global warming.

How do families go carbon neutral?

Follow the three steps:

1. Identify your energy usage – home, car and plane flights, using a carbon calculator on the Internet, calculate your carbon emissions.
2. Take steps to lower your energy usage - install compact fluorescent light bulbs, drive less, raise and lower your thermostat seasonally, wrap your hot water heater, etc.
3. Purchase carbon offsets to offset your carbon emissions that cannot be eliminated by lowering **your energy usage**. A fairly typical family of four releases about 65,000 pounds or 32 tons of carbon dioxide annually. These emissions are about twice the global average. It has been calculated that after a family has implemented energy conservation strategies, the purchase of carbon offsets would cost about \$185 per year, which is deductible from federal and some state income tax. It is likely that the family would achieve some annual savings in electricity and gasoline costs in excess of the carbon offset cost thus substantially lowering or eliminating the cost of going carbon neutral.

How do churches go carbon neutral?

1. Follow the same three steps as individuals, plus more.
2. Going carbon neutral becomes a comprehensive mission of a church that does not end when energy usage is lowered and carbon offsets are purchased.
3. It involves all aspects of church life from the pulpit to the classrooms, to the kitchen, to the community, beginning with a commitment from the Session.

A Church Going Carbon Neutral Involves More Than Purchasing Offsets. It means...

The Session:

- ❖ Affirming the Christian mandate to care for creation.
- ❖ Affirming that the urgency, injustice and seriousness of climate change calls the Church to act now and to act boldly to lead the way in reducing energy usage.
- ❖ Affirming the G.A. carbon neutral resolution.
- ❖ **Establishing carbon neutrality as a vital mission the church.**
- ❖ Leading the church and its members to lead carbon neutral lives.
- ❖ Asking us to pray to ask for God's forgiveness and

guidance as the whole church moves in a new direction.

And more

It means:

Education

- ❖ Helping your members, session and clergy understand the devastating effects of climate change and how urgent and serious the need is to reduce our carbon emissions.
- ❖ Preaching and teaching on the theology of being a good steward.
- ❖ Explaining over and over that reducing energy is a vital mission of the church.
- ❖ Helping your members to reduce their energy usage in their homes and businesses and to purchase carbon offsets.

It means:

Financial Commitment

- ❖ Making energy reduction costs a vital and ongoing part of the annual stewardship campaign.
- ❖ Conducting capital campaign for large energy reducing activities such as solar, replacing windows, etc.
- ❖ Annually purchasing carbon offsets.

It Means:

Witness

- ❖ Seeking to make amends for the injustice of our excessive energy usage on others.

- ❖ Developing an outreach initiative to connect with a family or village in Africa or the Arctic to put a human face on climate change impacts.
- ❖ Helping your community to switch to alternative energy.
- ❖ Opposing the construction of coal plants.

It means:

Property Committee:

- ❖ Commitment to continual evaluation of energy usage.
- ❖ Ongoing goal of reducing energy usage and switching church to renewable energy sources.
- ❖ Special maintenance and attention to solar equipment.

- ❖ Recycle

It means:

Congregational Care Committee

- ❖ Serve food grown locally at church meals and receptions
- ❖ Recycle leftovers
- ❖ Not use plastics
- ❖ Coordinate trips to visit shut ins

And finally it means:

Church members and staff

- ❖ Live their faith by seeking to right the injustice of their energy usage.
- ❖ Reduce their personal energy usage in their homes and businesses.
- ❖ Support the mission of the church to reduce its energy usage through their pledges and commitments.
- ❖ Work in their communities to help reduce energy usage.
- ❖ Ask our leaders to set carbon emission reduction goals as established by scientists to avoid runaway and dangerous climate change.

- ❖ Pray for forgiveness and guidance to make the right choices.

We can't buy our way out of climate change!

- ❖ Climate change is a serious issue and our need to respond to it is urgent.
- ❖ Discerning where to begin isn't easy and the dramatic changes we need to make will be difficult, but necessary.
- ❖ The GA resolution provides an opportunity for us to make a bold Christian witness to reduce our energy usage and offset our remaining carbon emissions, while reaching out to our neighbors.
- ❖ We can make a difference and lead the way for others by making carbon neutrality a mission of our churches and members.