

Counting Carbon

A resource for community organisations

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Reporting on carbon emissions is rapidly becoming expected, even required, of businesses and organisations, here in NZ and around the world. Social services, churches and other charities will not be exempt. We all need to play our part if, as a nation and as a world, we are to achieve the vital goal of stopping global warming.

Why?

Because the climate scientists are, sadly, being proved right. For years they have been warning of the dangers of burning fossil fuels; how carbon dioxide creates a 'greenhouse' effect which is raising the temperature of our atmosphere.

As a global human community we are faced with the immediate and growing threat of catastrophic events:

- more droughts and more fires
- more violent storms and floods
- rising oceans invading the land
- death of vulnerable habitats and creatures, on land and in the sea.

Then there are the hosts of flow-on effects, like diseases, pests eating crops, hiking insurance costs, massive immigration and refugee problems, sandy beaches sucked away, etc. etc.

These things are difficult to face, even to think about. You might have the luxury of ignoring it, deciding it is someone else's problem. But young people know full well that this is very much their problem, and not one of their making.

Holding our own responsibility for this problem means committing to reducing the carbon we burn. This means beginning to count our carbon.

As you start measuring your carbon footprint this will include waste (esp second hand shops) and your office power bill, but these will be minor compared to your fuel bill. Human transport is our carbon issue. Community organisations burn carbon in order to get people to where they want to be. That is traditionally how we care for people and build community – people meeting face-to-face. However, we now must factor in the impact on the environment of getting ourselves around.

How to measure carbon? Five Easy Steps!

1. Will-power, the commitment to begin this journey. This is a leadership decision.
2. Choose a calculator. A small organisation could 'DIY-it' with a free online calculator (e.g. the one on the Ministry for the Environment website).



Ekos and Toitu offer free or low-cost DIY options. They also have carbon analysts ready to help you (for a fee); you'll need help if you have several sites or units in your organisation.

3. Clarify what counts and what doesn't. Your carbon 'boundary' defines the emissions that you 'own' as an organisation, based on what you pay for. For example, if you run a conference you'd include the fuel or mileage of your staff (what you reimburse directly) but not the travel of others who attend.
4. Measure a Baseline Year. Input the data from your financial accounts from a past year. Most people are using the 2019-20 financial year as it wasn't too affected by Covid. Just ignore the 2020-21 year.
5. Set up systems for data entry going forward. These need to be consistent so you can compare 'apples with apples'.

What will it cost?

The main cost is the staff time involved. It will take some time initially, but it will become a normal part of your admin and reporting.

Toitu: Carbon Assess costs \$30 a month.

<https://carbonassess.toitu.co.nz>

Ekos have a free service to measure your Carbon Footprint.

<https://ekos.co.nz>

My recommendation is to talk with both companies about what they offer. Take up their offer of a free initial consultation.

If you decide to go 'all-in' and commit to being Carbon Zero you will need to be professionally reviewed. You can purchase carbon credits and become certified.

So what then?

Measuring carbon is the first step.

Reporting on your carbon shows that you are stepping up to this challenge and showing leadership in this field. This will impress your funders.

The next step is to plan to reduce your carbon emissions. This requires setting goals and exploring strategy.

Counting the Cost

Factor in carbon emissions. The cost of travel must now include the carbon as well as the direct fuel or ticket cost.

1 litre of petrol produces 2.45 kg of carbon dioxide (*it is counter-intuitive to think about the weight of an invisible gas, but we can feel the substance of air*).

Carbon Credits cost approx \$35 (and rising) per tonne of carbon dioxide. At this rate, 100 litres of petrol costs approx \$8.50 in carbon offset.

Air travel can be cheap but it has significant carbon emissions, especially because planes dump carbon direct into the atmosphere.



Reducing Carbon

1. Travel less

The Covid pandemic has forced this upon us, and we've all become Zoom experts (*I believe in Te Reo online meetings are 'zui'!*). This has come with real costs, but also real benefits and challenged our assumptions about getting together. How is this working in your organisation? Can people work from home? Can trips be combined or less often?

2. Travel in ways that make less carbon

To get around without burning carbon you have 4 options:

- a) walk. How can you promote walking?
- b) bike. Encourage staff to bike to work. Have bike stands. Run competitions. Buy e-bikes for short trips.
- c) electric vehicles. Can you purchase or lease EVs? Provide charging stations.
- d) public transport. How could your organisation make better use of busses & trains?

3. Burn petrol more efficiently

- a) Driver training can increase fuel efficiency.
- b) Switch to hybrid or other low-emissions cars. If your staff are driving old bombs or gas-guzzling SUVs, how will you support them to change?
- c) Ensure all vehicles are well maintained.

4. Look for energy efficiencies in your buildings

- a) Check appliances for power use. Train people to turn things off.
- b) Discuss your values and energy goals in decisions about heating, cooling and purchasing.

NZ Govt promotes energy efficiency through EECA (Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority). They have resources and online tools. Their 'Energy Management Journey Tool' is particularly helpful. www.eeca.govt.nz

5. Reduce waste

Landfill is bad on many levels, including what it adds to global warming.

Compost. Recycle. Reduce what you buy. Divert as much as possible from landfill.

A big issue for many community agencies is Op Shops. If your volunteers are handling society's waste they are playing a vital role in re-use. We need best practice policies and community partnerships to create alternatives to landfill for more and more stuff.

