

Use a Carbon Tracker and Save Money

Simple steps like driving less or turning off lights can decrease your carbon (CO₂) emissions and reduce climate change. And, you save money each time you take action. Using a carbon tracker can show you what to do.

Carbon Trackers are Useful

Very simply, a carbon footprint tracker is an app or website that allows you to input details about your lifestyle and calculate the carbon emissions you cause. You'll answer questions about your routines such as your electricity bill, how much meat you eat, how often you travel and how far you drive. The tracker then calculates your carbon footprint, which is the total amount of CO₂ or other greenhouse gases generated by your activities.

With people and companies increasingly concerned about climate change, the number of trackers has shot up. Some are country-specific and others are so generic that they may not be very useful, so it's important to choose a good one.

The US Environmental Protection Agency suggests using [Carbon Footprint](#), which has versions for many countries. There are also country-specific trackers. [SP Group](#) has a calculator specifically for Singapore, for instance, while conservation non-profits such as the [Nature Conservancy](#) and [Conservation International](#) have calculators designed for the United States.

Admittedly, most trackers don't catch all of the nuances in your activities. Your carbon footprint is affected by factors such as where your food is imported from, how much time you spend on electronic devices and how much food you waste. Carbon trackers also tend to focus on activities you can influence such as your residential energy, personal travel and food-related emissions and may miss some of what you do. Even without all the details, a tracker still gives excellent insights into the emissions you create.

Perhaps surprisingly, it's more important for climate-conscious consumers than for climate deniers to use a tracker. Ian Monroe, founder of climate tracking app [Oroeco](#), said in an interview with [Grist](#) that consumers who already believe they are "green" are less motivated to make more changes because they believe they're already doing enough.

Use the Insights to Save Money

Average carbon emissions for a person in the United States total 16 tons per year, according to Conservation International (CI), which is one of the highest levels in the world. The global average is about 4 tons, and we need to get it down to less than 2 tons by 2050 to have the best chance of avoiding a 2°C rise in global temperatures.

The question most people have, then, is what can they actually do about their own footprint. The better trackers provide specific suggestions. CI says it gives 50 tips based on your habits and location, for instance, so you can learn how to reduce emissions and save money.

While having the information is good, the key to success is actually using the results to change how you live, move and eat. And while acting faster is better, CI accurately observed that lowering individual carbon footprints doesn't happen overnight. Small changes like eating less meat or line-drying clothes are the start to making a big difference.

The impact of those changes can be big. You can reduce your carbon footprint by 3.6 kilograms for every day that you forgo meat and dairy, according to Columbia University, which saves about 1,300 kg or 2,920 pounds per year. Doing two loads of laundry weekly in cold water instead of warm water can save 225 kilograms. And research led by University of British Columbia professor Kimberly Nicholas found that living car-free for a year saves 2.4 tons of CO₂, avoiding airplane travel saves at least 1.6 tons and eating a plant-based diet saves 0.8 tons.

While it doesn't quantify the savings, the [Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland](#) has a multitude of tips to reduce energy consumption and lowers your bills. Use the fridge carefully, for example, since it takes 45 minutes for the fridge to cool back down if you leave the door open for 10-20 seconds. Thawing food in the fridge keeps the fridge cool. And not leaving the hot water tap running helps you avoid pouring money down the drain.

These steps and dozens more can each save money, in amounts small or large.

A few studies have also quantified some of the savings. Households can save US\$75 a year by replacing five of their most frequently used lightbulbs for LEDs, according to the Consumer Federation of America. The Singapore Environment Council estimates an average family in Singapore wastes S\$258 per year from food they throw away, and the NRDC estimates that American families waste at least \$1,365 worth of food per year. USA Today said you can reduce your electricity bill by 12 percent by turning off unnecessary lights. And energy consumed by electronic devices in standby mode can cost about US\$100 a year, according to the Center for Sustainable Systems. While these amounts individually might seem small, they add up and making more of the changes recommended by trackers can cut your costs even further.

Whether you're a passionate environmentalist or a climate change sceptic, consider using a tracker and making changes to save money. Regardless of your views, the changes also reduce carbon emissions.