

Cut Your Carbon Emissions with Lifestyle Changes, not Airline Offsets

With more people globally concerned about the impact of their carbon emissions on climate change, airlines have jumped in and now allow passengers to pay for carbon offsets. While these offsets help, flights are just one part of our everyday lives. Consumers can reduce their carbon emissions even more by making changes in their lifestyle, and they will save money at the same time.

Consumers have a Big Impact

Regardless of where we live, our activities create carbon emissions. Everything we do releases greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and has an impact on the planet's climate, the BBC explained, from the food we eat and products we buy to the way we travel. And while industry and transportation are the highest emitting sectors, consultancy Oliver Wyman said the residential sector accounts for 27 percent of total energy consumption and 17 percent of carbon emissions.

The average carbon footprint per person per year globally is about four tons, according to the World Economic Forum (WEF), though Singaporeans emit about twice that much and Americans emit four times that amount. By some estimates, the WEF added, we need to reduce our individual carbon emissions to two tons a person globally by 2050 to prevent temperatures from climbing.

Airline Offsets Help

Among our many activities, airline travel has perhaps received the most attention. And that travel does create a massive amount of carbon emissions. About 2.4 percent of global carbon (CO₂) emissions come from aviation, the BBC found, and the industry is responsible for about 5 percent of global warming once other gasses and water vapour trails from aircraft are added in. A return flight from London to San Francisco emits around 5.5 tons of CO₂ equivalent per person, for example, which is more than twice the emissions produced by a family car in a year.

Many airlines now enable consumers to purchase "carbon offsets" to mitigate the impact of emissions from their flight. Carbon offsets balance out your pollution by investing in projects that reduce emissions of carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gases. With a carbon offset, media giant Vox explained, an individual can pay someone else to cut or remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere by actions such as planting trees, buying cleaner-burning cookstoves in developing countries or financing a wind turbine generator for power.

In the face of aviation's rising emissions problem, though, the United Nations created the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA). The initiative aims to help airlines cancel out the environmental impact of growth in international flights after 2020 by making them buy carbon emissions offsets. What many consumers don't realise, Wired magazine said, is that many airlines must offset increased emissions to meet the UN agreement, so they no longer need to rely on individuals buying carbon offsets.

Alternatives can Reduce Consumer Carbon Emissions More

While carbon offsets for airline flights do help, they actually only reduce part of the carbon emissions each person produces. And, especially now, many consumers don't fly anywhere. There are other steps that consumers can take to reduce their carbon emissions and mitigate climate change.

To identify which strategies are best for reducing household emissions, University of Leeds researcher Diana Ivanova and her colleagues analysed nearly 7,000 studies. Nature magazine reported that they quantified the choices that lead to the steepest carbon cuts for three types of purchase: food, housing and transport. For food, the team found, adopting a vegan diet has the biggest impact. For housing, adding solar panels or otherwise generating renewable electricity saves the most. The biggest savings overall are in transportation,

however, when consumers go car-free or shift to an electric vehicle or take fewer long-distance flights.

Along with reducing planet-warming emissions, CNBC observed, these changes can save money. Indeed, analysis at the University of Michigan found that efficient households in the US can save \$1,560 a year on natural gas and utility costs. Consumers can install LED lightbulbs, turn off electronic devices rather than putting them in standby mode, set the temperature lower in colder weather and higher in warmer weather, replace single-use plastic with reusable alternatives, eat a more plant-based diet and replace old household appliances with energy-efficient ones. Media firm Eco-Business similarly suggests opting for a fan rather than air conditioning, replacing old appliances with energy-efficient ones, unplugging devices when not in use, embracing a car-lite lifestyle and reducing how much meat you eat.

A variety of carbon footprint calculators can estimate how much carbon you create and how much you'll save by making changes. The calculator from Singapore's SP Group (<https://mycarbonfootprint.spgroup.com.sg>), for instance, helps consumers build awareness of their carbon footprint and suggests ways to reduce it.

If you still want to offset your remaining emissions, you can buy other carbon offsets. In Singapore, for instance, startup firm Capture (<https://www.thecapture.club>) helps consumers track their climate footprint from everyday mobility choices and enables them to offset emissions through tree planting. In the US, Terrapass has helped hundreds of thousands of individuals take responsibility for their impact on the climate through dozens of renewable energy and greenhouse gas elimination projects that have reduced greenhouse gases equivalent to billions of tons of carbon dioxide. And Switzerland-headquartered myclimate (<https://www.myclimate.org>), with a motto of "do your best, offset the rest", enables consumers to offset unavoidable emissions.

There are plenty of relatively simple changes each of us can make, then, to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate climate change. And along with the environmental benefit, the changes save us money too.