



Key steps and assumptions in the ClearSky Carbon Footprint Calculator

General

All figures are converted to metric tons of CO₂ or CO₂ equivalent (CO₂ eq., which accounts for other greenhouse gases in combination with CO₂, such as methane or nitrous oxides). 2205 lbs = 1 metric ton.

Coefficients and calculations are based on the most reliable and current information as of January 2010, and will be updated as new information becomes available.

Using the same sources and calculation as the ClearSky Carbon Footprint Calculator, the US average per capita emissions would be 13.5 metric tons CO₂ eq. per year. This figure results from the following estimates:

- 4.0 metric tons CO₂ from residential energy use (<http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/downloads06/07ES.pdf>)
- 3.8 metric tons CO₂ from person vehicle use (<http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/downloads06/07ES.pdf>)
- 1.6 metric tons CO₂ equivalent from aviation (http://www.bts.gov/publications/national_transportation_statistics/html/table_04_05.html and <http://www.eia.doe.gov/oiaf/1605/coefficients.html>)
- 3.6 metric tons CO₂ equivalent from food consumption (<http://bie.berkeley.edu/calculator.html> and <http://bie.berkeley.edu/coolcalc/calculations.html#foodgoodsservices>)
- 0.5 metric tons CO₂ equivalent from waste ([http://yosemite.epa.gov/oar/globalwarming.nsf/UniqueKeyLookup/RAMR6MBLPJ/\\$File/06Waste.pdf](http://yosemite.epa.gov/oar/globalwarming.nsf/UniqueKeyLookup/RAMR6MBLPJ/$File/06Waste.pdf))

Using a more inclusive estimate of indirect and direct emissions, the US Energy Information Agency estimates that the US average per capita emissions would be 23.8 metric tons CO₂ eq. per year. This figure results from the estimate that total US emissions were 7,122 million metric tons CO₂ equivalent in 2004, divided by the US population of 299 million.

This calculator does not account for the entire range of personal activities that generate CO₂ emissions but it is based on a few common, standardized activities for the sake of simplicity. Comparing the all-inclusive estimate of 23.8 metric tons CO₂ eq./year and our estimate of 13.5 metric tons CO₂ eq./year for US citizens, it is likely that you would have to increase your calculated emissions from the ClearSky Calculator by 50-70% to account for indirect emissions.

As a comparison, global per capita CO₂ emissions are roughly 4.37 metric tons/person, according to the US Energy Information Administration (<http://www.eia.doe.gov/pub/international/iealf/tableh1cco2.xls>).

Living Section

The average per capita emissions figure of 8.1 metric tons CO₂ eq. per year results from the following estimates:

- 4.0 metric tons CO₂ from residential energy use (<http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/downloads06/07ES.pdf>)
- 3.6 metric tons CO₂ eq. from food consumption (<http://bie.berkeley.edu/calculator.html> and <http://bie.berkeley.edu/coolcalc/calculations.html#foodgoodsservices>)

- 0.5 metric tons CO₂ eq. from waste
([http://yosemite.epa.gov/oar/globalwarming.nsf/UniqueKeyLookup/RAMR6MBLPJ/\\$File/06Waste.pdf](http://yosemite.epa.gov/oar/globalwarming.nsf/UniqueKeyLookup/RAMR6MBLPJ/$File/06Waste.pdf))

The US state emission factors for electricity generation are from the EPA's eGRID2007 (version 1.0) database (<http://www.epa.gov/cleanenergy/energy-resources/egrid/index.html>). US State emissions factors are determined by the eGRID sub-region power pool. In cases where a given state contains multiple sub-regions, the following deciding factors were used to determine which sub-region would represent the entire state:

- 1) overwhelming population majority in one sub-region over the others (i.e. Nevada),
- 2) overwhelming geographic majority of one sub-region over the others (i.e. Michigan), and
- 3) if geography and population of the sub-regions were not clearly biased in one direction, we used the sub-region with the larger emissions factor to remain conservative in our calculations (i.e. Wyoming).

Data for Canadian provinces are from 2006 figures from Environment Canada. Their National Inventory Report with emissions factors for electricity on the Canadian Provinces can be accessed at: (http://www.ec.gc.ca/pdb/ghg/inventory_report/2006_report/a9_eng.cfm).

Emission factors for propane and heating oil are from the EIA Voluntary Reporting Program (<http://www.eia.doe.gov/oiaf/1605/coefficients.html>). For natural gas, we assume 1000ft³ = 10 therms and use an emissions factor of 0.0001304 lbs CO₂ per BTU.

Data on total energy use by household type come from the Energy Information Administration's 2001 Residential Energy Consumption Survey (<http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/recs/contents.html>). These figures are scaled according to the number of bedrooms in the household, using information from the same survey.

We multiply input kWh figures by 1.072 to account for electricity transmission losses (<http://climatetechnology.gov/library/2003/tech-options/tech-options-1-3-2.pdf>).

The method of accounting for the proportion of renewable energy used at home is taken from SafeClimate and the World Resources Institute (<http://www.safeclimate.net/calculator/>). We reduce the CO₂ emissions due to electricity by the percentage of renewable power used. For example, if 25% of your electricity is supplied by a green power supplier, emissions due to electricity are reduced by 25%.

The estimate of 3.6 metric tons CO₂ eq./ year for US per capita food consumption comes from the Berkeley Institute of the Environment (<http://bie.berkeley.edu/calculator.html> and <http://bie.berkeley.edu/coolcalc/calculations.html#foodgoodsservices>). They rely on the Economic Input-Output Life Cycle Assessment model by the Green Design Institute at Carnegie Mellon University, which accounts for the full chain of production for common food groups. This estimate includes emissions related to production, transport, wholesale, and retail activities. For comparison, the US EPA Draft Inventory of US Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks: 1990-2006 report accounts for annual agriculture-related emissions amounting to 724 million metric tons CO₂ eq., or 2.4 metric tons CO₂ eq. per capita (<http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/usinventoryreport.html>). This report considers emissions directly from agriculture and attempts to include energy consumption, land-use practices, and fossil fuel combustion (http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/downloads/08_Agriculture.pdf, http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/downloads/08_Energy.pdf, http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/downloads/08_LULUCF.pdf, <http://www.eia.doe.gov/oiaf/aeo/supplement/index.html>). It is impossible to allocate emissions from some of the overall categories in this report (freight transport or automobile use, for example), so we feel it is best to use the slightly larger, more conservative estimate.

Emissions reductions for diet assume a 24% increase for a heavy meat diet, a 42% decrease for mostly vegetarian diet, and a 72% decrease for a vegan diet. Choosing organic food most of the time reduces

calculated GHG emissions by 29%, while “sometimes” results in a 15% reduction. These estimates are based on The Nature Conservancy’s Carbon Footprint Calculator, which in turn is based on the following sources: <http://geosci.uchicago.edu/~gidon/papers/nutri/nutriEI.pdf> (Eshel and Martin 2006) and <http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/July05/organic.farm.vs.other.ssl.html> (Pimental et al. 2005).

Data on CO₂ emissions from waste are from the EPA (<http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/July05/organic.farm.vs.other.ssl.html>), based on an estimate of 141 million metric tons of waste-related CO₂ eq. Emissions reductions due to recycling and composting are taken from the EPA (http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/ind_calculator.html and <http://www.epa.gov/compost/>). Recycling everything locally available results in a 42% reduction in waste-related emissions, while composting everything possible yields a 24% reduction. Values for “sometimes” options in both cases are intermediate values (20% reduction for recycling and 10% for composting).

When calculating an individual’s footprint, the Living subtotal is equal to residential energy use divided by the number of people in the household, plus individual emissions for food and waste. When calculating an entire household’s footprint, the Living subtotal is equal to residential energy use, plus emissions for food and waste multiplied by the number of people in the household. Food and waste estimates (3.6 metric tons CO₂ eq. for food and 0.5 metric tons CO₂ eq. for waste) are automatically included in the Basic calculation, and they are included with options for reduction in the Advanced calculation.

Driving Section

If the “US Average” option is selected, the calculator multiplies the number of vehicles driven by the US average of 5.5 metric tons CO₂ eq. per vehicle (US EPA, http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/ind_calculator.html). Otherwise, the Basic calculation assumes the average U.S. vehicle is driven 12,000 miles per year (http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/ind_calculator.html), and divides this estimate by the EPA’s MPG figures for the various vehicle types (<http://www.epa.gov/oms/cert/mpg/fetrends/420r06011.pdf>). We multiply gallons of fuel consumed by the emissions conversion factor (24.7 lbs CO₂/ gal for gasoline, 28.0 lbs CO₂/gal for diesel) from the Argonne National Laboratory Greenhouse Gases, Regulated Emissions, and Energy Use in Transportation (GREET) Fleet Footprint Calculator (http://www.transportation.anl.gov/modeling_simulation/GREET/footprint_calculator.html). In the advanced calculation, the same emissions factor is used, but users are allowed to input specific mileage and MPG numbers.

The EIA Voluntary Reporting Program (<http://www.eia.doe.gov/oiaf/1605/coefficients.html>) lists emissions factors of 19.3 lbs CO₂/ gal for gasoline and 22.4 lbs CO₂/ gal for diesel, which are strictly based on the combustion of the fuel. The GREET model accounts for “upstream” emissions resulting from the production and delivery of the gasoline, and therefore more accurately depicts the full environmental cost.

Flying Section

Our emissions factors for short, medium, long, and extended flights (0.64, 0.45, 0.39, and 0.39 lb CO₂/mile, respectively) are from the World Resources Institute’s GHG Protocol for Mobile Sources (<http://www.ghgprotocol.org/>).

We apply a Radiative Forcing Index (RFI) of 2.7 (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, <http://www.grida.no/climate/ipcc/aviation/064.htm>) to account for other GHGs emitted during air travel.

The RFI value we use is based on a conservative estimate by the IPCC, which we feel represents the most thorough scientific opinion. Airplane GHG emissions are comprised of only half CO₂, and releasing these gases into the upper atmosphere yields a greater impact than release at ground level. Other carbon footprint calculators may ignore this consideration (basically using an RFI of 1) or use lower values closer to 2. We believe it is our responsibility to fully account for accepted contributions to global climate change, although it may result in a larger carbon footprint value for individuals who fly frequently.

In the Basic calculation, we multiply the resulting emissions (lb CO₂ eq./mile) by the average velocity of 414.65 mph for air travel provided by the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (2005 data for System Revenue Aircraft Miles Flown and total number of scheduled System Revenue Aircraft Hours (Airborne), http://www.bts.gov/xml/air_traffic/src/datadisp.xml). This yields lb CO₂ eq./hr of air travel. We estimate that occasional air travelers fly 10 hrs/year, moderate travelers fly 20 hrs/year, and frequent travelers fly 30 hrs/year. To convert these estimates into metric tons of CO₂ eq., we use WRI's short flight emission factor. These assumptions may result in higher footprint values for individuals who only fly occasionally, so we recommend using the Advanced calculation if you feel the calculator is overshooting your personal impact.

In the Advanced calculation, we multiply the emissions factor (lb CO₂ eq./mile) for by the mileage estimates guides (for a single leg) for short, medium, long, and extended flights. Estimates for individual legs are multiplied by 2 to account for a round-trip flight. Users are asked to input the number of round-trip flights, rather than the number of individual legs, to make counting easier.

Total Footprint

The total carbon footprint in this calculator is the sum of the Living, Driving, and Flying subtotals.

If you still have questions about the ClearSky Carbon Footprint Calculator, send an email to: info@clearskyclimatesolutions.com and we'll be happy to help.