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Fayette County
118 North Sixth Street
Vandalia, IL 62471
618/283-2753

Taking Steps Toward Leaving a Smaller Carbon Footprint

Published: Oct. 28, 2010

Source: Tony Endress, (217)244-1679; aendress@illinois.edu

Using energy for transportation, to power appliances, make interiors comfortable, and other purposes is nearly impossible to avoid. And, although there are energy-saving steps that can be taken, leaving a carbon footprint is inevitable. University of Illinois students in a carbon registry class created a website with tools that help in understanding what contributes to carbon output and suggest ways to offset the damage.

The site, located at <http://illinicarbon.illinois.edu/>, allows carbon-conscious consumers to learn the size of their carbon footprint as an individual or as a household by selecting amounts of energy used from categories such as home energy, driving and flying, food and diet, and recycling.

"The students incorporated a simple calculator developed by The Nature Conservancy and a more comprehensive calculator from the Berkeley Institute of the Environment at the University of California so visitors can actually calculate the negative impact their annual activities have on the environment," said Tony Endress, a U of I professor in the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences who teaches the class along with Wes Jarrell. "It calculates your carbon usage and offers a suggested 'payment', or 'offset', of sorts."

For example, if after you make selections based on your activities, your estimated greenhouse gas emissions are 18 tons of carbon dioxide equivalent per year, the website suggests a possible donation of \$360 to a fund that will support further carbon reductions, and some changes you could make in your everyday behavior that could reduce your climate impact.

"The website is a local version of other national and international carbon offset projects," said Jarrell. "The idea is to find ways that we all can counter our negative activity to the environment with something positive like changing modes of transportation or how we deal with lighting."

"The illiniCarbon website will offer people in the Champaign-Urbana community the chance to help the worldwide push to combat global warming, while at the same time making a visible impact on their community," said Jake Metz, one of the students who developed the site. "With illiniCarbon, we're focusing not only on helping to reduce carbon emissions, but also on building stronger, more sustainable communities.

"By utilizing our registry to offset employee travel, the University of Illinois can help lead the way to a more sustainable future by offsetting its carbon emissions while at the same time investing in energy-saving projects in the local area," Metz said.

Ross Polk, acting Vice President of illiniCarbon said one of the important ideas behind illiniCarbon is that it can be replicated across the country on multiple college campuses. "We've been working on creating a business model that is easily exportable and flexible enough to work in any college environment," he said.

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News writer: Debra Levey Larson
phone: 217-244-2880; email: dlarson@illinois.edu

Local Contact: University of Illinois Extension, Rachele Hollinshead, County Extension Director,
618/283-2753