

Carbon Neutral

– *To be or not to be*

Wherever you turn, in 2007, you will notice rapidly increasing concern about global warming. I term 2006 the tipping point on the issue. As a consequence, people, led by celebrities, politicians and industry leaders are becoming more conscious about their own carbon footprints. You may also find terms such as carbon friendly, greenfleet and carbon neutral enter your vocabulary. To be Carbon Neutral is to achieve a net balance of zero greenhouse gas emissions by reducing consumption, increasing utilisation efficiency, and offsetting the remaining emissions by purchasing carbon credits. Some major institutions such as HSBC, Swiss Re, Vancity and Insurance Australia Group have committed to becoming carbon neutral. So has the World Bank. The Olympics, World Cup Soccer and the Super Bowl are also going carbon neutral. Even the Australian Football League (AFL) is aspiring for games to be carbon neutral. Add to this carbon neutral feature films, documentaries, books, conventions, taxi rides, air travel, rock bands, schools and churches. Even carbon neutral weddings are becoming commonplace.

The National Greenhouse Accounts show that Australia produced around 565 million tonnes of greenhouse gases in 2004. Whilst industry contributes the bulk of the emissions, domestic emissions also play a significant role. Each average Australian is responsible for around 13 tonnes of carbon dioxide an year, experts estimate. This may cost in the order of around a \$1 to \$2 per day to offset.

The easiest and often costliest approach to be carbon neutral is to buy offsets. This is to calculate the emissions profile and offset the emissions by purchasing any of a variety of sources. Carbon credits may come from trees being planted (over the life of the trees), methane capture, clean development projects and tradable

emissions reductions such as that which arise from schemes such the NSW Greenhouse Gas Abatement Certificates (NGACS). But, there needs to be a conscious effort to follow a hierarchical process towards neutrality. This must begin with demand management and with increasing efficiency. In other words, reducing wastage. There are substantial gains to be made in these critical areas, which have limited payoff periods, and therefore make bottom line sense. The remainder could be offset through a range of mechanisms. I encourage you, as a first measure toward carbon neutrality to consider what your emission profiles may be at home and at work, and look to see whether you could reduce them by taking some simple steps. This will not only help the planet breath easier, but also add dollars to your bottom line. A number of emissions calculators are available on the Internet.

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