

# The climate diet: Your 10 step plan to cut carbon in 2009

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Xanfeon's Dr Michael Gell offers businesses 10 pointers to reduce emissions in 2009

2009 is going to be a pivotal year for businesses embracing carbon reduction initiatives. With the recent UK Climate Change Act committing to 80% cuts in emissions by 2050 and potential for the US to enact similar targets as the new administration takes office, now could be the right time for your business to make some New Year's carbon resolutions.

Here are 10 to consider:

## **1. Establish a carbon reduction plan**

If your carbon reduction plan is going to be successful, it needs several important ingredients. Leadership. Ownership. Governance. Communication. Advocacy. If someone in executive management has ownership of the plan and there is strong leadership and a sound governance structure, this will send positive signals through the business and to stakeholders that the business is serious about reducing its carbon emissions. The plan needs to be well communicated and for that the business needs advocates to promote the plan, both internally and externally.

## **2. Identify some bite-sized carbon reduction projects**

Once the business has decided it wants to reduce its carbon emissions, identify examples of projects that could be carried out and prioritise them. That could be in terms of return on investment or the potential to gain a competitive edge in the market. By choosing bite-sized projects to start with, it will be easier for people to engage and understand what

needs to be done. Pilot projects are a great way to explore the scope for carbon reductions in different areas, for example on a process line or in an office or across the fleet of delivery vans. Lessons learned through a pilot project can then be implemented with success on a larger scale. Don't forget to delegate as emissions reduction projects are established across the business!

### **3. Start with successes (do low cost / no cost first)**

As with any endeavour, it is a good option to achieve early successes while incurring little or no cost. Simple actions like making sure that the building heating systems are operating only when needed, that lights are automatically turned off when no-one is in the work place, and that someone has responsibility to clean the dust of the heat exchangers at the back of the refrigerators can achieve energy and carbon savings at very little expense. Don't limit activities just to energy systems. Think about business purchases. By purchasing remanufactured laser printer cartridges rather than new ones there is the potential to reduce embodied emissions in the product by up to about 60% - as well as gaining cost savings. The materials used for business stationery (brochures, letterheads) reflect the company culture – consider using recycled materials which have not been bleached and which don't use solvent-based inks.

### **4. Ask staff how they would reduce carbon**

Reducing carbon isn't about buying one piece of energy-saving technology that does everything. There may be thousands of opportunities to save carbon within the business and many of those opportunities may already have been recognised by staff. Ask staff what they would do, encourage them and endorse the carbon reduction suggestions that will bring success. You never know, a simple suggestion coming from the factory floor may lead to a development in the business processes or workflow that saves the company money. Did you know that the compressors are left on all weekend and that they are not turned off because no-one has the responsibility to do that? That cost saving opportunity was just waiting to be identified. All that had been missing was a simple question from management: "What do think we should do?"

### **5. Identify carbon reduction projects through team meetings**

Consider having carbon reduction as an agenda item for the regular team meetings. That will help to keep carbon reduction at the front of people's minds and provide regular opportunities for them to feed in their suggestions, comments and questions. As suggestions are distilled through the business, employees may see their ideas turned into successful business projects. These could also provide opportunities for staff to take on new responsibilities for learning and skills development.

### **6. Keep people aware and involved**

Keep employees aware of what the company is doing on the carbon reduction front. They may be feeding in their comments and suggestions through team meetings but it is vital to provide feedback. Which suggestions are being taken forward? Which carbon initiatives are on hold and why? By keeping people aware and involved in what the business is doing, it will be easier to maintain buy-in for carbon reduction and to keep the enthusiasm and momentum going. Incentives schemes, like bonuses linked to carbon

reduction, are gaining popularity amongst businesses. Think about relevant training courses for employees who want to learn more.

### **7. Recognise achievements within the business**

Don't forget to recognise when something has been done well and when people achieve small goals. Many businesses have evolved to be carbon intensive and quite wasteful so it is important to recognise that people are being asked to challenge ways of doing business which may have become 'the norm'. It might not always be obvious that someone has made a sterling effort when trying to change a process or system that resists change. Think about the barriers to carbon reduction that might be holding people back.

### **8. Improve communications**

There are always a lot of things that can be done to improve communications, and using carbon reduction can be a great way to stimulate positive communication, team building and a sense of purpose. It could be as simple as a message on emails asking not to print documents unnecessarily or poster campaigns along different themes, such as saving water and turning off computers when leaving the office. The procurement process could be also revamped, so that suppliers are requested to provide estimates in terms of carbon footprints as well as costs.

### **9. Talk to customers and suppliers about carbon reduction**

Across supply chains, customers are asking their suppliers about how much they have reduced carbon footprints and what their carbon plans are going forward. By talking to your suppliers and customers about carbon reduction, new opportunities for business development may emerge. It may be possible to bring your customers and suppliers closer together with your business adding that extra value in between, and helping to make the business network stronger and more competitive. Don't forget, your suppliers and customers may actually be struggling with what to do to reduce their carbon footprint. Start a dialogue about carbon reduction to initiate a team effort through the supply chain.

### **10. Measure the reduction**

You will know if your plan is going well. But only if you measure the changes that are taking place in your business. There are obvious things to measure. The size of the electricity bill. The size of the water bill. The carbon performance of your suppliers. There might be other things that are not so obvious to measure but will tell you a lot about what is happening in the organisation and how the culture is changing. The number of staff coming to work on bicycles or by car sharing (did you really need all that car parking space). The number of suggestions coming out of team meetings. The number of environmental courses that staff are taking. The things you choose to measure are important, because not only will they tell you about how well your business is performing, but they can also be used to incentivise and reward staff, and, most importantly, help plan the roadmap for your business into the low carbon economy.

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