

WARM SEA
 GREEN PLANET REFLECTION
 PROBLEM POWER WEATHER
 OCEAN GREENHOUSE GASES
 SURFACE ENERGY BLUESKY
 ENVIRONMENTAL
 GLOBAL WARMING
 SIGN HEAT
 DISASTER NATURE GLOBE
 LANDSCAPE
 ENVIRONMENT
 WARMING ATMOSPHERE
 COLOR DRY
 HOUSE GLOBAL
 CLIMATE CHANGE
 WORLD ECOLOGY SUN
 PLANT POLLUTION
 EARTH DESERT
 EMISSION
 CLOUDS CONCEPT
 COLD ECOLOGICAL
 CARBON
 WATER
 EFFECT
 MELTING HOT MELT
 GRASS SYMBOL
 DIOXIDE
 FUTURE CO2
 ECO
 CLIMATE
 CHANGE

THE  CO₂ LEXICON





A carbon offset is a reduction in emissions of carbon or greenhouse gases made in order to compensate for or to offset an emission made elsewhere

Carbon offsets are measured in metric tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent (CO₂e) and may represent six primary categories of greenhouse gases. One carbon offset represents the reduction of one metric ton of carbon dioxide or its equivalent in other greenhouse gases.

There are two markets for carbon offsets. In the larger, compliance market, companies, governments, or other entities buy carbon offsets in order to comply with caps on the total amount of carbon dioxide they are allowed to emit.

In the much smaller, voluntary market, individuals, companies, or governments purchase carbon offsets to mitigate their own greenhouse gas emissions from transportation, electricity use, and other sources. For example, an individual might purchase carbon offsets to compensate for the greenhouse gas emissions caused by personal air travel. Many companies offer carbon offsets as an up-sell during the sales process so that customers can mitigate the emissions related with their product or service purchase.

Offsets are typically achieved through financial support of projects that reduce the emission of greenhouse gases in the short- or long-term. The most common project type is renewable energy, such as wind farms, biomass energy, or hydroelectric dams. Others include energy efficiency projects, the destruction of industrial pollutants or agricultural byproducts, destruction of landfill methane, and forestry projects. Some of the most popular carbon offset projects from a corporate perspective are energy efficiency and wind turbine projects.





Glossary of Climate Change and Carbon Offset Terms

Additionality

Emissions reductions are “additional” if they occurred because of the presence of incentives associated with the existence of GHG markets, voluntary or mandatory. A variety of stakeholders have proposed many different additionality “tests,” but at its root, demonstrating the additionality of a carbon offset means showing that the emissions reductions being used as offsets are not “business as usual.” Business-as-usual emissions are generally referred to as the emissions “baseline”.

Afforestation

Planting of new forests on lands that historically have not contained forests.

Alternative Energy

Energy derived from nontraditional sources (e.g., compressed natural gas, solar, hydroelectric, wind).

Atmosphere

The gaseous envelope surrounding the Earth. The dry atmosphere consists almost entirely of nitrogen (78.1% volume mixing ratio) and oxygen (20.9% volume mixing ratio), together with a number of trace gases, such as argon (0.93% volume mixing ratio), helium, greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide (0.035% volume mixing ratio), and ozone. In addition the atmosphere contains water vapor, whose amount is highly variable but typically 1% volume mixing ratio. The atmosphere also contains clouds and aerosols.

Biomass

Total dry weight of all living organisms that can be supported at each tropic level in a food chain. Also, materials that are biological in origin, including organic material (both living and dead) from above and below ground, for example, trees, crops, grasses, tree litter, roots, and animals and animal waste.

Carbon Dioxide

A naturally occurring gas, and also a by-product of burning fossil fuels and biomass, as well as land-use changes and other industrial processes. It is the principal anthropogenic greenhouse gas that affects the Earth’s radiative balance.



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Climate Change

Climate change refers to any significant change in measures of climate (such as temperature, precipitation, or wind) lasting for an extended period (decades or longer). Climate change may result from:

- Natural factors, such as changes in the sun's intensity or slow changes in the Earth's orbit around the sun;
- Natural processes within the climate system (e.g. changes in ocean circulation);
- Human activities that change the atmosphere's composition (e.g. through burning fossil fuels) and the land surface (e.g. deforestation, reforestation, urbanization, desertification, etc.)

Deforestation

Those practices or processes that result in the conversion of forested lands for non-forest uses. This is often cited as one of the major causes of the enhanced greenhouse effect for two reasons: 1) the burning or decomposition of the wood releases carbon dioxide; and 2) trees that once removed carbon dioxide from the atmosphere in the process of photosynthesis are no longer present.

Ecosystem

Any natural unit or entity including living and non-living parts that interact to produce a stable system through cyclic exchange of materials.

El Niño – Southern Oscillation (ENSO)

El Niño, in its original sense, is a warm water current that periodically flows along the coast of Ecuador and Peru, disrupting the local fishery. This oceanic event is associated with a fluctuation of the intertropical surface pressure pattern and circulation in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, called the Southern Oscillation. This coupled atmosphere-ocean phenomenon is collectively known as El Niño-Southern Oscillation. During an El Niño event, the prevailing trade winds weaken and the equatorial countercurrent strengthens, causing warm surface waters in the Indonesian area to flow eastward to overlie the cold waters of the Peru current. This event has great impact on the wind, sea surface temperature, and precipitation patterns in the tropical Pacific. It has climatic effects throughout the Pacific region and in many other parts of the world. The opposite of an El Niño event is called La Niña.

Emissions

The release of a substance (usually a gas when referring to the subject of climate change) into the atmosphere.

Emissions Factor

A unique value for scaling emissions to activity data in terms of a standard rate of emissions per unit of activity (e.g., grams of carbon dioxide emitted per barrel of fossil fuel consumed).



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Global Warming

Global warming is an average increase in the temperature of the atmosphere near the Earth's surface and in the troposphere, which can contribute to changes in global climate patterns. Global warming can occur from a variety of causes, both natural and human induced. In common usage, "global warming" often refers to the warming that can occur as a result of increased emissions of greenhouse gases from human activities.

Greenhouse Effect

Trapping and build-up of heat in the atmosphere (troposphere) near the Earth's surface. Some of the heat flowing back toward space from the Earth's surface is absorbed by water vapor, carbon dioxide, ozone, and several other gases in the atmosphere and then reradiated back toward the Earth's surface. If the atmospheric concentrations of these greenhouse gases rise, the average temperature of the lower atmosphere will gradually increase.

Greenhouse Gas (GHG)

Any gas that absorbs infrared radiation in the atmosphere. Greenhouse gases include, but are not limited to, water vapor, carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs), ozone (O₃), hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), perfluorocarbons (PFCs), and sulfur hexafluoride (SF₆).

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

The IPCC was established jointly by the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Meteorological Organization in 1988. The purpose of the IPCC is to assess information in the scientific and technical literature related to all significant components of the issue of climate change. The IPCC draws upon hundreds of the world's expert scientists as authors and thousands as expert reviewers. Leading experts on climate change and environmental, social, and economic sciences from some 60 nations have helped the IPCC to prepare periodic assessments of the scientific underpinnings for understanding global climate change and its consequences. With its capacity for reporting on climate change, its consequences, and the viability of adaptation and mitigation measures, the IPCC is also looked to as the official advisory body to the world's governments on the state of the science of the climate change issue. For example, the IPCC organized the development of internationally accepted methods for conducting national greenhouse gas emission inventories.

Kyoto Protocol

An internationally binding agreement that falls under the more general United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The Protocol sets GHG targets for countries that sign and ratify the agreement. The United States and Australia are among the few countries that ratified the UNFCCC but did not ratify the Protocol and thus are not subject to its GHG reduction targets. A corollary to this is that emissions reduction projects in the United States cannot be used for compliance with the Kyoto Protocol.



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Natural Gas

Underground deposits of gases consisting of 50 to 90 percent methane (CH₄) and small amounts of heavier gaseous hydrocarbon compounds such as propane (C₃H₈) and butane (C₄H₁₀).

Nitrogen Oxides (NO_x)

Gases consisting of one molecule of nitrogen and varying numbers of oxygen molecules. Nitrogen oxides are produced in the emissions of vehicle exhausts and from power stations. In the atmosphere, nitrogen oxides can contribute to formation of photochemical ozone (smog), can impair visibility, and have health consequences; they are thus considered pollutants.

Nitrous Oxide (N₂O)

A powerful greenhouse gas with a global warming potential of 296 times that of carbon dioxide (CO₂). Major sources of nitrous oxide include soil cultivation practices, especially the use of commercial and organic fertilizers, fossil fuel combustion, nitric acid production, and biomass burning. The GWP is from the IPCC's Third Assessment Report (TAR).

Ozone (O₃)

Ozone, the triatomic form of oxygen (O₃), is a gaseous atmospheric constituent. In the troposphere, it is created both naturally and by photochemical reactions involving gases resulting from human activities (photochemical smog). In high concentrations, tropospheric ozone can be harmful to a wide range of living organisms. Tropospheric ozone acts as a greenhouse gas. In the stratosphere, ozone is created by the interaction between solar ultraviolet radiation and molecular oxygen (O₂). Stratospheric ozone plays a decisive role in the stratospheric radiative balance. Depletion of stratospheric ozone, due to chemical reactions that may be enhanced by climate change, results in an increased ground-level flux of ultraviolet (UV-) B radiation.

Ozone Layer

The layer of ozone that begins approximately 15 km above Earth and thins to an almost negligible amount at about 50 km, shields the Earth from harmful ultraviolet radiation from the sun. The highest natural concentration of ozone (approximately 10 parts per million by volume) occurs in the stratosphere at approximately 25 km above Earth. The stratospheric ozone concentration changes throughout the year as stratospheric circulation changes with the seasons. Natural events such as volcanoes and solar flares can produce changes in ozone concentration, but man-made changes are of the greatest concern.



The Carbon Lexicon

Particulate Matter

Very small pieces of solid or liquid matter such as particles of soot, dust, fumes, mists or aerosols. The physical characteristics of particles, and how they combine with other particles, are part of the feedback mechanisms of the atmosphere.

Photosynthesis

The process by which plants take CO₂ from the air (or bicarbonate in water) to build carbohydrates, releasing O₂ in the process. There are several pathways of photosynthesis with different responses to atmospheric CO₂ concentrations.

Recycling

Collecting and reprocessing a resource so it can be used again. An example is collecting aluminum cans, melting them down, and using the aluminum to make new cans or other aluminum products.

Reforestation

Planting of forests on lands that have previously contained forests but that have been converted to some other use.

Sink

Any process, activity or mechanism which removes a greenhouse gas, an aerosol or a precursor of a greenhouse gas or aerosol from the atmosphere.

Soil Carbon

A major component of the terrestrial biosphere pool in the carbon cycle. The amount of carbon in the soil is a function of the historical vegetative cover and productivity, which in turn is dependent in part upon climatic variables.



The Carbon Lexicon

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

The Convention on Climate Change sets an overall framework for intergovernmental efforts to tackle the challenge posed by climate change. It recognizes that the climate system is a shared resource whose stability can be affected by industrial and other emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. The Convention enjoys near universal membership, with 189 countries having ratified.

Under the Convention, governments:

- Gather and share information on greenhouse gas emissions, national policies and best practices
- Launch national strategies for addressing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to expected impacts, including the provision of financial and technological support to developing countries
- Cooperate in preparing for adaptation to the impacts of climate change

The Convention entered into force on 21 March 1994.

Weather

Atmospheric condition at any given time or place. It is measured in terms of such things as wind, temperature, humidity, atmospheric pressure, cloudiness, and precipitation. In most places, weather can change from hour-to-hour, day-to-day, and season-to-season. Climate in a narrow sense is usually defined as the "average weather", or more rigorously, as the statistical description in terms of the mean and variability of relevant quantities over a period of time ranging from months to thousands or millions of years. The classical period is 30 years, as defined by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). These quantities are most often surface variables such as temperature, precipitation, and wind. Climate in a wider sense is the state, including a statistical description, of the climate system. A simple way of remembering the difference is that climate is what you expect (e.g. cold winters) and 'weather' is what you get (e.g. a blizzard).

END