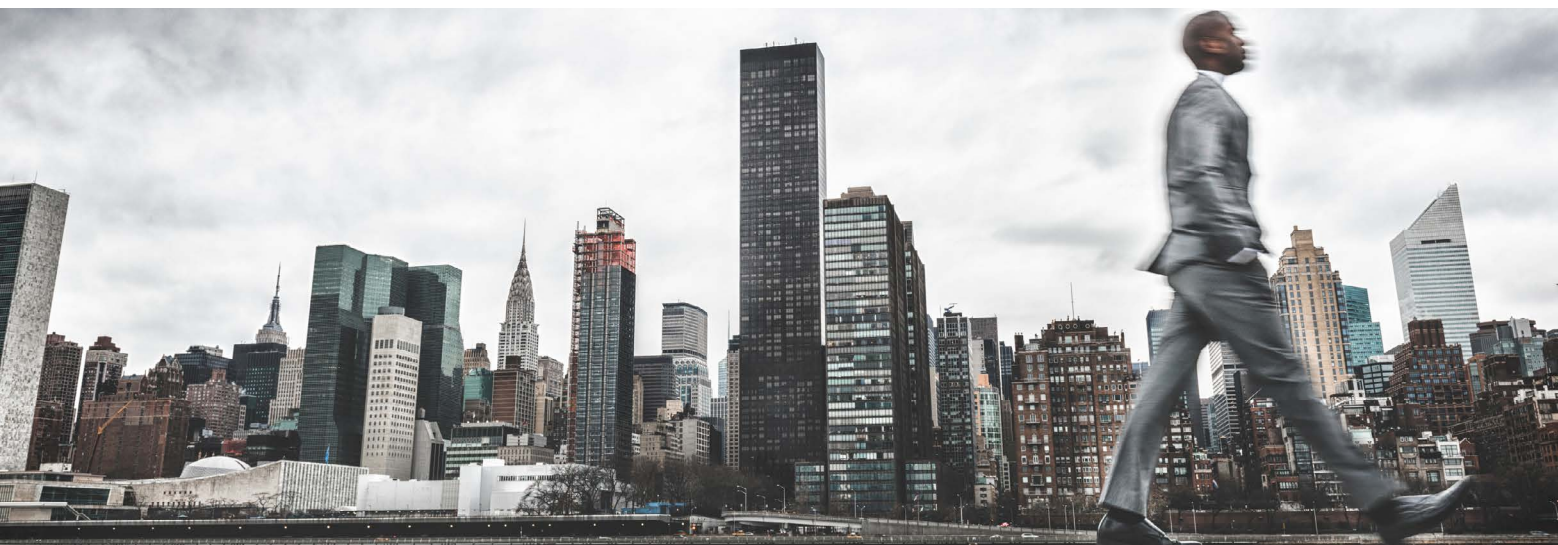




REDUCING CORPORATE AMERICA'S ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The evidence is clear that the commercial sector is a major contributor to climate change. It also can be a major force in reducing it.

Addressing climate change is good business, and even small “green” actions and policies by American companies have a significant impact on decreasing damage to the environment and producing positive results.

To understand how business can reduce its environmental impact, we need to understand that impact more clearly.

A LOOK AT THE ISSUE

The Earth’s average temperature has increased 1.5 degrees Fahrenheit over the last 100 years, and scientists expect it to rise an additional 0.5 to 8.6 degrees Fahrenheit in the next century. Even these seemingly tiny temperature changes “translate to large and potentially dangerous shifts in climate

and weather,” according to the [Environmental Protection Agency](#).

A recent [report](#) by Richard Heede of the Climate Accountability Institute found that 90 investor- and stated-owned companies produced 63% of the greenhouse gas emissions from 1751 to 2010. These firms’ cumulative global carbon dioxide and methane emissions equal about 914 gigatons of carbon dioxide. Almost one-third of the emissions were produced by the top 20 companies studied.

Even organizations that don’t produce impact-intensive products, such as oil, gas and cement, contribute to climate change.

Commercial enterprises—from large multinational corporations to small businesses and home offices—

use a significant amount of energy to heat, cool and light their facilities and operate necessary equipment. They also produce an enormous amount of waste in terms of paper, plastic, food and electronics. These actions combine to produce conditions that hasten climate change.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE DATA

Here's a breakdown of the organizations included in Heede's analysis:

83

are oil, gas and coal producers

7

are cement manufacturers

50

are investor-owned firms

31

are state-owned companies, such as Saudi Arabia's Saudi Aramco and Russia's Gazprom.

9

are government-run industries, mostly in China, Poland and the former Soviet Union.

LEADING CHANGE

Businesses of all sizes can reduce their impact on the environment and climate change. Here are eight suggestions:

- 1. Follow the rules and regulations.** Obeying local recycling ordinances and complying with state and federal regulations are crucial to reducing your enterprise's impact, but they are the minimum. Many companies are going further, setting even higher internal standards for their operations. As concerns about climate change rise, so does demand for energy and environment compliance officers to monitor and manage corporate impacts and ensure adherence.
- 2. Audit your impact.** Gain a full understanding of your venture's impact with an environmental audit. Your survey should include items such as emission sources and amounts, energy use (from motor fleets, lighting, heating/cooling, equipment, etc.), water use and discharge, waste stream, supply chain, and more. Quantifying your impact is the only way to successfully reduce it with better internal processes, procedures and policies. In larger firms, this process may be overseen by the chief sustainability officer. If you don't have one, consider engaging an intern from the [Environmental Defense Fund's Climate Corps](#).
- 3. Manage equipment power.** The total electricity from always-on equipment and electronics equals the [annual output of 50 large power plants](#), according to a report from the National Resource Defense Council. Better power management is an easy win. Activate automatic power management on computers, monitors and displays. Turn off all nonessential equipment, electronics and appliances at day's end; and unplug devices that don't need to be on (think of all those toaster ovens in company break rooms that are drawing power unnecessarily right now!). When replacing equipment and electronics, choose Energy Star-qualified items that offer advanced power-management features.
- 4. Buy, build or rent green commercial space.** Look for facilities optimized for minimal environmental impact. LEED- and Energy Star-certified spaces are built with low-impact materials using sustainable practices, and they are designed to use less energy and produce lower emissions. Also look for space with green power options such as solar, biomass, wind or geothermal. These sources reduce reliance on fossil fuels and curb your corporate carbon impact. Bonus: These structures frequently cost less to run.
- 5. Reduce waste.** Many municipalities require commercial recycling for paper and plastics, but businesses can do more by diverting other items, such as food waste, batteries, printer cartridges, and appliances and electronics. For instance, the EPA estimates that [3.14 million tons of electronic waste was generated in 2013](#) alone, and only 40% was recycled. So a companywide e-cycling initiative makes a big difference. Look for take-back programs that accept items for reuse, recycling and proper

disposal. Make it easy for employees to dispose of items properly with recycle/e-cycle bins placed near points of use. Many recycling and waste-diversion programs qualify for tax credits or rebates, creating an economic incentive to participate. Identify opportunities to reduce waste in your operations. The [EPA reports](#) that Andersen Corp. initiated waste-reduction programs that produced internal rates of return of more than 50%.

6. **Decrease paper use.** The paperless office is a myth, but a less-paper office is real. Paper makes up [more than one-third of the waste stream](#), so any initiative to use less is helpful. Besides creating policies to discourage printing and encourage double-sided printing when possible, look for opportunities to produce electronic-only editions of items such as your annual report, sales materials and instructional manuals. Use cloud or network-attached storage to safeguard important documents that don't require hard copies for legal or tax purposes. Select recycled paper, recycled printer cartridges and low-impact inks for the documents you do print.
7. **Green your supply chain.** Hold your suppliers and vendors to the same high standards you create for your business. Working with people who share your commitment multiplies the value of your environmental efforts and can improve operational

and cost efficiency. According to the EPA, [GM cut its disposal costs by \\$12 million](#) after collaborating with suppliers to create a reusable container program.

8. **Advocate for smarter policy.** Business has a powerful voice in local, state, national and even global policy discussions. More and more businesses are partnering with environmental-policy organizations to create solutions that are good for the climate and the corporate bottom line. Increasingly, municipalities, businesses and professional groups are hiring energy and environmental policy professionals to research, write and enforce guidelines and legislation.

By deploying any or all these activities, individual businesses create small positive improvements in the environment. But the most meaningful results arise when many commercial enterprises adopt and embrace greener practices. The collective efforts of the business community—both large and small enterprises—make a measurable difference.

That's why former vice president and climate-change activist Al Gore is now optimistic about reversing climate change.

"We have everything we need," he said in a [2016 TED Talk](#). "Some still doubt that we have the will to act, but I say the will to act is itself a renewable resource." ■

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- [The MS in Environmental Sciences and Policy](#) focuses on studying environmental effects and creating and enforcing environmental policies and is designed for professionals who want to approach climate change through smarter policy.

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