

How to Calculate Your Carbon Tithe

What do we each owe for the damage our way of life is doing to the planet?

Obviously, calculating the exact dollar value of our personal responsibility for the unpredictable vagaries of climate disruption is next to impossible. But the point of taking the Carbon Tithe Pledge is more to encourage engagement with the impacts of our behavior than to be sure we are paying the exact right price.

The manner of determining your carbon tithe is up to you, and should be based upon conscience, financial capability, and time available.

The simplest method might be to pledge a monthly amount and commit to it, although that method somewhat sidesteps the Pledge's purpose of encouraging you to continually monitor and attempt to improve your carbon footprint.

Other possible methods include committing to contribute a dime a gallon for all fuel used each month, or to contribute an amount equal to some percentage of all fossil fuels costs incurred by you or your family each month. (As a reference point, it should be noted that the word "tithe" means ten percent, although, again, it is up to you to decide the level of your commitment.)

For the latter method, a number of good carbon footprint calculators are available online. For example, one provided by Terrapass (<http://www.terrapass.com/carbon-footprint-calculator>) is fairly inclusive of direct fuel costs, shows how your footprint compares to the national average, and suggests a dollar amount that might offset your carbon production.

For the more ambitious, other factors to take into account include the embedded carbon costs of manufactured goods, shipping distances for food and other consumables, amount of red meat eaten, and the weight of garbage disposed. Some of these considerations were taken into account in an Excel spreadsheet created specifically for eastern Jefferson County for the Taming Bigfoot competition. To download that spreadsheet, go to <http://I2020.org/climate-action/bigfoot/>, and scroll down beyond all the tally sheets to "Bigfoot Calculator." The file is password protected against editing (and hence entering values), so once you've downloaded and opened it, you will need to go to the "Tools" menu, then select "Protection," and then "Unprotect Sheet." You will be asked for a password—which is "bindschadler."

The following is a list of other carbon footprint calculators available online. Please keep the program managers informed of the methods you are using! This is a program under development, and we are very interested in your innovations.