

Carbon Offsets

The films *The Day After Tomorrow* (Twentieth Century Fox), *Syriana* (Participant Media), and the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* (Paramount Vantage) were the first major motion pictures to be considered “climate neutral”. By investing in reforestation efforts and renewable energy projects, they sought to “offset” the carbon dioxide emissions generated by their productions. CO2 offsets have since become an increasingly popular trend in the entertainment industry, and it is becoming the primary tool for measuring a production’s environmental commitment. However, climate change is only one aspect of our ecological footprint. Along with curbing greenhouse gas emissions, sustainable production also means:

- Sustainable use of our planet’s natural resources.
- Reduction of waste and toxic pollutants in our landfills and waterways.
- Promotion of organic agriculture and equitable global food distribution.
- Water conservation.

All of these factors contribute to our impact on the environment, and should be considered in any sustainable production strategy.

“Carbon neutrality” itself is controversial. There are no globally agreed upon standards, and any regulations imposed on the market are voluntary, and extremely difficult to verify. In the entertainment business, this is further complicated by the fact that there are no industry-specific formulas to calculate how much carbon dioxide a production generates. Does “carbon neutral” include deforesting the rainforest for luan? What about the carbon footprint of the petrochemical plastics used to construct the set? Are carbon credits purchased to offset travel limited to compensating for the travel of the cast and crew, or have the greenhouse gas emissions from transporting food, water, and materials been considered? Given these limitations, it is more realistic to discuss reducing, not neutralizing, carbon emissions.

Finally, because financial considerations are by far the biggest impediment to making more environmentally responsible productions, the best strategy for reducing global warming is to concentrate on minimizing consumption and waste, rather than trying to compensate for it after the shoot.

If there is money in the budget for offsets, first consider:

- Hiring an environmental consultant to assist your production with sustainability efforts.
- Paying to switch from fossil fuel-based energy to 100% renewables with the local utility company.
- Purchasing sustainable, locally sourced building materials, food, etc. even if at higher cost.
- Ensuring that your recycler will divert the majority of your waste, including organics, from landfill to reduce methane emissions.
- Creating a financial incentive program for the cast and crew to choose environmentally friendlier travel options.
- Purchasing any available alternatives to petrochemical products.

CARBON OFFSET COMPANIES

The Environmental Media Association’s “Fast Facts about Offsets” page

with a link to www.climateclean.net

Climate Care

www.climatecare.org

Making tangible, measurable investments in your production’s environmental efforts is the most effective way to reduce your overall carbon footprint.