

## GREEN BUILDING: Appalachian Offsets program helps environment, local efforts

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Concerned individuals and businesses have a new way to make a difference in the amount of greenhouse gases that are released into the air in our local community. Appalachian Offsets is a nonprofit, voluntary carbon offset program to combat global warming through local renewable energy and efficiency projects in Western North Carolina. The program is a three-step process.

First, visit [www.AppalachianOffsets.org](http://www.AppalachianOffsets.org) and calculate your “carbon footprint.” Second, reduce as much energy as you can. Third, offset the rest. The tax-deductible donation will be spent on energy efficiency and renewable energy projects in local affordable housing that would not have been possible without the offset donation. For instance, if an individual calculates that his lifestyle is responsible for emitting 8 tons of carbon into the atmosphere because of his energy use, he can pay to eliminate 8 tons of emissions somewhere else. Thus, the footprint is offset.

There is a lot of discussion on a national and international scale about carbon offsets and renewable energy credits. The programs all attempt to address climate change through economic actions, but some are more legitimate than others.

Appalachian Offsets stresses the importance of people and organizations to attempt to save energy first, not just buy their way out of it. And it is important to fund projects that wouldn't have happened without the donation. This is the concept of additionality. Many programs buy offsets from renewable energy systems that already exist, but Appalachian Offsets will pay for new projects only. Also, it is important to take action locally.

The first project will replace incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescents in the Asheville Housing Authority's low-income rentals. Using a single 13-watt compact fluorescent bulb instead of a 60-watt incandescent bulb saves more than 470 kWh of electricity over its lifetime. A single compact fluorescent bulb will save 425 pounds of coal that would release 583 pounds of carbon dioxide and 17 pounds of sulfur dioxide, not to mention other harmful pollutants. By eventually replacing more than 13,000 incandescent bulbs, the Housing Authority and its residents will reduce carbon emissions by more than 3,790 tons and sulfur dioxide by more than 100 tons. Participants in this project will be helping clean the air for the region's children and saving money for themselves and the Housing Authority.

Carbon calculations are a great way to learn about how you use energy in your personal life or business and, with Appalachian Offsets, you can actually do something about it. Offsetting a ton of carbon costs about \$15, but if an organization gets together, it can reduce the cost per ton and make a large impact. Plus, if a business or organization offsets its entire footprint, it can market that it is “carbon neutral.” Carbon offsets are certainly not the answer to climate change or our reliance on fossil fuels, but it is a great educational tool that does make a difference.

Maggie Leslie is the program director of the WNC Green Building Council. For more information, visit [www.wncgbc.org](http://www.wncgbc.org) or call 254-1995.

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