



KEVIN O'NEILL / STAFF ARTIST

Tread lightly

Website has information and advice to help you reduce your carbon footprint

The ongoing, tragic oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico has a lot of people thinking about how our energy use affects the environment. It's a subject that's been a big part of the international conversation for years now, but an event like this spill — that has an immediate, dramatic impact — tends to focus people's attention more than talk of future global warming, with its more complex consequences. If you want to



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InSites

know the impact your life is having on the earth, **greatenergychallenge.com** can give you an estimate.

The Great Energy Challenge is a three-year initiative by a team of some of the world's best and brightest researchers and scientists looking to gain a better understanding of the world's energy situation. The site is a partnership between the National Geographic Society and Shell oil company. It's not a stand-alone site, it's actually a section of National Geographic's main site, but it has lots of good information. There's news and features, a personal energy meter, an energy diet calendar, energy quizzes, an energy blog and more.

Measure your footprint

The Personal Energy Meter on the site tells you how many tons of carbon dioxide your activities emit in a year. You start by entering your zip code, which takes you to a page depicting a 3-D graphic of a house along with the average annual national and regional carbon dioxide emissions per person. Next, you answer several questions about your home energy use. As you answer the questions your score updates, telling you how many tons of carbon dioxide you're emitting. Then there are questions about your automobile use, your use of renewable fuels and your annual air travel.

I scored 13.69 tons of carbon dioxide, compared to a regional average of 10.66 tons and a national average of 10 tons. That's 22 percent higher than the regional average and 27 percent higher than the national. I was only on the site a

Energy saving tips

■ **Electronics:** Plug computers, TVs, DVDs, etc. into a power strip that can turn them all off at once when not in use. Electrical appliances left on stand-by mode use up to 8% of your home's energy.

■ **Light bulbs:** Compact fluorescent bulbs use 20% of the energy of incandescent bulbs. Replace old bulbs with CFLs as they burn out.

■ **Laundry:** A clothes dryer is one of the biggest energy hogs in your house. Use a drying rack or clothesline when possible.

■ **Diet:** Replacing beef or pork with poultry once or twice a week will not only reduce greenhouse gases, it will also make you healthier.

■ **Commuting:** Car pooling, mass transit or biking to work, even a couple days a week, will remove over a ton of CO2 emissions per year.

■ **Composting:** Food scraps and yard waste can be recycled into the garden keeping it out of the landfill where it contributes to greenhouse gas emissions.

■ **Heating:** Look around the house and see where you can add insulation, repair caulking and weatherstripping or replace windows with double-pane units. It will conserve energy and save money.

few minutes and already I felt guilty about my lifestyle.

There are also mini-calculators on the site that give you tips on how to save energy in different areas of your life, such as:

- Lighting
- Insulation
- Laundry
- Dishwashing
- Heating
- Eating
- Driving
- Refrigeration
- Car washing

- Composting
- Lawn care
- Water heating
- Air conditioning
- Vampire voltage

If, for example, you click on the lighting calculator, it will ask you how many bulbs in your house are compact fluorescent. It will then tell you how many pounds of carbon dioxide your lighting currently produces annually, and how much you can decrease that, as well as how much money you'll save, if you switched to all compact fluorescent bulbs.

There's an Energy Diet section that gives monthly tips on how to shrink your carbon footprint. The Global Footprint section has a map depicting the 12 countries that emit 80 percent of the world's greenhouse gases. The Energy News section has current energy-related stories from around the world. The Feature Reporting section has articles and essays on a wide range of energy topics. And the About section details the Great Energy Challenge, including profiles of some of the key members of the team.

Abundant resources

There are numerous links to National Geographic's vast reporting on energy and environmental issues. The National Geographic Channel link has powerful video and photos of the Deepwater Horizon disaster while the rig was burning and being evacuated.

There's a Green Guide link that offers still more tips on ways to live more sustainably. It offers advice on buying appliances, light-bulbs, water, home improvement materials, etc. There's also information on recycling, green gardening and more.

While the gulf spill has raised awareness of the risks of extracting fossil fuels, this site shows that energy use is a very broad and deep subject that touches almost every aspect of our lives. This can make it feel overwhelming to even try to "green" your lifestyle. It's so complex you may wonder where to begin. Hopefully this site will give you a starting point.

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