



# THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF WORKING FROM HOME



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In 2020 we saw working from home become 'the new normal'. As a result, most businesses are reevaluating their working policies and implementing hybrid working for employees, with SMEs leading the charge. Businesses have seen many benefits, such as improved employee wellbeing and increased diversity and inclusion. But what about environmentally? Carbon emissions associated with employees working from home contribute to your company's carbon footprint, so it's important to take ownership of them as a business. If you attribute those emissions to your employees' personal footprints, you'll produce a skewed carbon footprint measurement.



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*Updated in October 2021*

# YOUR CARBON FOOTPRINT

You might think that your company's carbon footprint will reduce with employees working from home, but it's not necessarily the case. You'll see a reduction in your workplace's electricity, gas and water carbon emissions, employees commuting less frequently and less business travel. And that's great! However, the steps you've taken in your workplace to reduce your carbon footprint, such as implementing energy and water efficiency technologies and switching to a renewable energy supplier aren't normally found in people's homes. Combine this with the average office area powered per employee increasing drastically from a shared office space to an often larger personal home office, and you may actually see an increase in your company's carbon footprint.



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# HYBRID WORKING

Most businesses are now moving to hybrid working, with some employees working from the office while others are working from home. This means offices are running as if they were at full capacity - so lights are on for the whole floor, even though half the employees are in, for example. With many employees still working from home and producing emissions that contribute to your company's carbon footprint, hybrid working could result in a big increase in your total carbon footprint.



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# HOW DO YOU MEASURE YOUR CARBON FOOTPRINT?

Some businesses that have measured their employees' working from home emissions have shared unexpected results of an increased carbon footprint. That highlights the importance of measuring this element to get a full picture of your carbon footprint so you can work on reducing it.

A lot of businesses are put off from measuring their employee's working from home emissions as it can be confusing. But the process can be as simple or complex as you like. [Our carbon calculator](#), with a basic or advanced option and based on [Ecoact's whitepaper](#) is a great starting point for your first few measurements. The methodology is based on average assumptions. For future iterations you could work on adding more variables to your calculations for a more accurate measurement, as suggested in the 'enhanced data collection' section of Ecoact's whitepaper.

We understand it's difficult, but we really encourage you to measure your employees' working from home emissions. As an SME, you have an advantage over large corporations - you have fewer employees so it's easier to collect data from everyone and to influence change.



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# DON'T FORGET TECHNOLOGY

Technology is an aspect of working from home that's often forgotten about when measuring carbon emissions. It's really hard to measure, so we're not suggesting you do that now, but it's important you're aware of them. Here are a few examples:

- A spam email emits approximately 0.3g CO<sub>2</sub>e
- An unnecessary email (one that has up to four words, like 'thank you very much') emits approximately 1g CO<sub>2</sub>e
- A standard email emits approximately 4g CO<sub>2</sub>e
- An email with attachments emits up to 50g CO<sub>2</sub>e
- A one-hour HD video call between two people emits approximately 290g CO<sub>2</sub>e



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# WHAT YOU CAN DO

There's no one size fits all solution. First, you'll need to measure your working from home emissions, and then continue to measure them annually and refine your variables so you can assess where and how you can make reductions. You'll be able to develop unique solutions that'll work for your business. Some ideas are:

- When implementing hybrid working, be more tactical with space. Can you downsize your office, or implement zonal light sensors? Can you ask teams to be in at the same time, so meetings are in person instead of virtual?
- Make employees aware of working from home emissions and how they could reduce them. Encourage people to use natural light, turn down their thermostats, switch their devices off and to turn cameras off when attending external events and for some virtual meetings.
- Think of ways to make it easier for employees to change their behaviour and mindset. Can you incentivise moving to a renewable energy supplier or installing double glazed windows?
- Set standards for virtual working and meetings. Encourage people not to send unnecessary emails, to use the phone instead of some video calls and to share links to documents instead of sharing an attachment.



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