

How Net Zero Carbon Differs from Carbon Neutral ¹

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As understanding of the climate crisis increases and the harm to ourselves, the environment, business, industry and the economy that will follow, so a desire to not only reduce carbon but to be seen reducing carbon increases.

Two seemingly interchangeable terms often seen are 'Carbon Neutral' and 'Net Zero Carbon'.

The two, however, are not the same thing.

Carbon neutral refers to a policy of not increasing carbon emissions and of achieving carbon reduction through offsets. While Net zero Carbon means making changes to reduce carbon emissions to the lowest amount - and offsetting as a last resort. The offsetting is used to counteract the essential emissions that remain after all available reduction initiatives have been implemented.

In both cases Carbon Offsetting removes CO₂ from the environment. For it to count, that removal must be permanent and accredited or licensed. Projects can offer a range of benefits. As well as reducing carbon from the atmosphere, offset projects can be selected to also offer social and community benefits. Projects can range from local planting of trees to the funding of projects that empower families in developing countries to reduce their dependence on fossil fuels. Examples include afforestation, reforestation and conservation. Alternative investments can also be made in initiatives that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as in cattle feed that reduces the methane output of cows.

Other offsetting projects enhance biodiversity, improve soil quality, food production or rainwater absorption. Projects that benefit soil quality are particularly pertinent to global warming and climate change, as soil is a significant store of carbon, holding three times as much carbon as the atmosphere - and the importance of soil quality has often been overlooked. Food production benefits are relevant too given that crop failure is a significant negative impact of climate change, devastating communities and forcing migration.

There are carbon offset schemes offered that are sold on an arbitrary average carbon footprint basis, as opposed to a quantified footprint. The risk with these is that they offer the temptation of an easy-to-buy option, which not only does not include any emission reductions but they also may fail to meet sufficient offset to address the problem of climate

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change. These are sold on the basis that a true quantification of your carbon footprint can be expensive, time-consuming and complicated but this need not be the case.

Net Zero Carbon Commitments always involve emission reductions. This requires an initial carbon footprint measurement. This is followed by strategic greenhouse gas emission reduction initiatives, the implementation of renewable energy solutions and then carbon offsetting.

The right carbon reduction service can offer you all of these. Furthermore, they can support you in your net zero commitment with ongoing monitoring both of the success of the initiatives but also of emerging technologies for further emission reduction opportunities. These could be in the form of technology, or availability of alternative energy - or internal opportunities from changes in processes, or collaborative opportunities with your supply chain. Potential opportunities could arise with local business partners such as neighbouring manufacturing facilities with whom you may be able to trade reused processed heat or reuse or repurpose materials. For example, could your carbon cardboard waste be shredded to become their packaging material or could waste heat from your processes be used for their hot water or offices?

This sort of methodical, structured and quantified approach leads to more optimised use of resources, lower energy bills, reduced waste, reduced reliance on the national grid, the delivery of true reductions in emissions and so true reduced harm to the environment.

About the Author



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