



## Planning a Low Carbon Event

Every conference, incentive, meeting and event produces carbon emissions from its planning through to its delivery in virtually all activity. The headline emissions are principally seen as travel, especially air where this is part of an event. This is a fast growing emissions source, but it is not the only source of emissions that can be addressed when planning and delivering an event. All consumption of goods and services has a carbon footprint and understanding how this works is key to planning a lower carbon event. It is not possible to run an event with zero carbon emissions, but it is possible to produce a low carbon event. Factoring emissions into events resonates with participants, but also with corporate clients who are increasingly assessing their supply chain on the basis of their carbon responsibility.

### 1. Planning

At the planning stage the focus should be on power and material usage by event managers, followed by how the event itself will be carbon intensive.

**Company Power** usage can be reduced by implementing energy saving policies to reduce energy consumption through heat and light. The Carbon Trust estimates that companies waste around £6,000 each year by leaving non essential equipment on during weekends and bank holidays. Turning off equipment at source when not in use saves power and thus emissions. Heat is a major emissions source; is your office air conditioning tracking the seasons and are you wearing your winter wardrobe to deal with excessive summer cooling by your office AC?

**Paper Usage** in offices is a significant source of carbon emissions, make sure that your company recycles paper and uses recycled paper stock. The US charity Conservatree, estimate that 500 sheets of virgin paper stock with no recycled element require 6% of a tree to produce. A fully mature tree can store over 3 tons of carbon dioxide and helps the environment more when growing in a forest than lying in landfill or a waste paper basket.

**Plastics** are commonly used for packaging and a range of event purposes. Limiting plastic consumption is essential to saving CO<sub>2</sub> and wider sustainability. It comprises a large proportion of UK landfill but does not degrade easily. When using plastic be sure to recycle. Recycling plastic will save one and half times its own weight in carbon emissions, versus the creation of new plastic.

**Event Locations** will use a large amount of energy and materials. Choosing a venue with active energy saving policies and recycling will reduce the event impact. The choice of suppliers based upon their energy efficiency in non travel sectors has led to greater supplier activity in energy saving. Hotels increasingly offer towel and sheet change options that reduce both water waste, but also power usage, thereby saving emissions. Green Suites International has calculated that a linen/towel reuse programme can save 200 barrels of oil each year. The increased use of energy saving programmes and use of renewable energy by hotels and venues should be assessed when choosing a venue.

**Mode of Transport** is a significant factor in the emissions tariff for the event. For short haul events where there are surface travel options these could be explored. Both in the UK and Europe there are luxury train charter options, which save emissions and do not compromise event quality. Trains have a further benefit in travel time and travel experience calculated on a door to door basis. For air travel, the class of travel and airline all play a part in emissions generation and travel policy can play a significant role in emissions reduction.

## 2. Operation

The operation of an event requires the movement of participants and the movement of company staff to support and manage an event. Additionally there are the shipping of materials and the consumption of goods and services in a venue.

**Materials** used at the venue and those that are shipped will have their own carbon footprint. For goods that are shipped by air in the hold of a passenger aircraft can account for over 3kgs of carbon dioxide for every 5kgs of weight transported on a short haul flight. This emissions ratio of weight to emissions also applies to the baggage carried by staff and participants. Lower carbon emissions can be achieved through avoiding carrying excess baggage. For materials, it is necessary to assess whether these can be produced locally as opposed to being transported.

Meetings Strategies Worldwide suggest that a typical five day conference with 2,500 delegates will use 90,000 cans or bottles, 750,000 cups and 87,500 napkins. The use of linen and not paper napkins for example can have a significant carbon benefit, as can use of recycled napkins. The WWF in its annual survey of the toilet paper, napkin and face wipe industry in the EU calculates that the annual production of these products uses over 25 million trees each year. For set builds there is a greater opportunity to select materials that are reusable and will reduce your carbon footprint.

**Recycle.** The UK commercial sector, which includes the events industry, produces over 40 million tons of waste annually of which only 25% is recycled. Recycling saves carbon emissions, for plastics this is 1.5 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> for each ton of plastic recycled and a saving of 900 kilos for a ton of paper. Paper and card comprise 20% of commercial waste in the UK. Recycling should be a key part of waste management activity for any event and office waste.

**Transport** use can be minimised in destination if planned with energy efficiency in mind. For example choose a venue that ensures that participants can walk between their hotels and the convention centre in a few minutes, or where there is an excellent public transport system. Avoid excessive travel and power consumption in event activities.

**Communication** of energy saving messages to participants is compatible with the public desire to reduce emissions and can feed into client policies on the environment. Simple activities such as turning off light, air conditioning and power in a room when not in use and encouraging the use of local venues with locally sourced food products will also reduce event emissions.

**Research** your client's corporate policy through their websites and for larger companies The Carbon Disclosure Project. Try to mirror company policy in event execution. This helps to mobilise and engage participants with energy saving and lower carbon living and working. A short time spent researching your clients policies may also help you to build on your existing client relationships.

### **3. Results**

If you have put in the time and effort to create a green event, remember to measure it as part of any post event reporting and to support future bids and proposals.

If you have used lower carbon practices like energy saving and recycling, list the measures you have taken and the tangible results. For further support in calculating emissions please contact The Carbon Consultancy.

Making an impact on reducing emissions is a key plank of corporate social responsibility, but communicating this to staff and suppliers will help to mobilise greater carbon efficiency at both a corporate and personal level.

For further information on any of the points raised above, please email [info@thecarbonconsultancy.co.uk](mailto:info@thecarbonconsultancy.co.uk) or call 0845 644 8411.