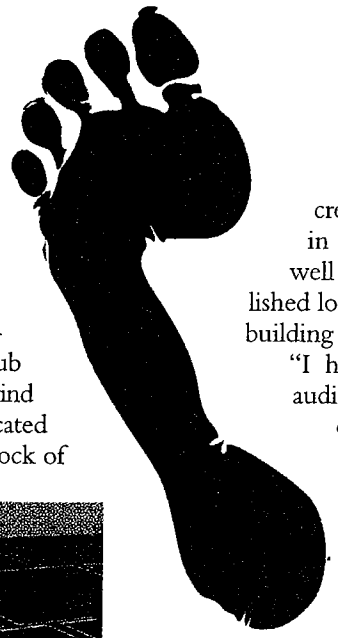
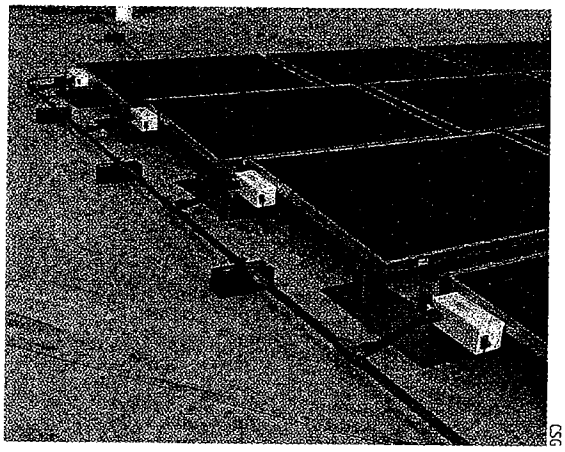
Clean Up Your Ecological Footprint



Say you are a home performance professional and active in the green building movement. Do you ever wonder if flying to a conference in a distant state, or even in another country, puts back into the air most of the greenhouse gases that you have taken out of the air by making homes more energy efficient? Airplanes burn an awful lot of fossil fuel, as do cars and the coal-fired power plants that provide electricity to our homes. Some people call this tradeoff robbing Peter to pay Paul. For the past seven years the Conservation Services Group (CSG), through its division Sun Power Electric, has offered to offset personal emissions of CO_2 and other greenhouse gases by subsidizing renewable energy production, while helping to transform the energy market.

Sun Power offered this offset opportunity through ReGen, a tradable renewable certificates (TRC) product in the New England area. In 2004 alone, 192 ReGen customers purchased renewable energy credits equal to 2.19 million kWh of renewable generation, preventing more than 3 million pounds of CO_2 from entering Earth's atmosphere. As the national energy market has moved more toward renewables, with many states and municipalities mandating that a certain percentage of power generation in their area be created from renewable energy sources, CSG is launching a new national product, called ClimateSAVE.

"We offer people a chance to clean up their ecological footprint," says Patricia Stanton, the director of renewable energy markets at CSG. Through ReGen, commercial and residential customers were able to buy renewable energy that was a mix of 1% solar and 99% produced using landfill gases. Now, through ClimateSAVE, individuals, companies, and organizations can buy a mix of 5% solar, mostly from CSG's PV installations on BJ's Wholesale Club stores in New York, and 95% wind energy from wind turbines located on farmland in Kansas. One block of credits that ClimateSAVE makes available, also called green tags, costs $99 per year and represents the production of 6,000 kWh of renewable energy. This is approximately 60% of the electricity used by an average household in the United States. So offsetting the impact of an average home's electricity use for a year through ClimateSAVE renewable energy credits would cost less than $200.



CSG

This PV installation, which is designed, owned, and operated by CSG, produces renewable energy credits that are traded through ClimateSAVE.

But renewable energy credits are more than just a way to express personal virtue. They can have valuable marketing benefits as well. Renewable energy credits have already helped commercial building owners gain points in the U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) for Commercial Buildings program. The USGBC is in the process of creating a LEED for Homes program. Renewable energy credits could find a place in this rating system, as well as in already-established local and national green building programs.

"I hear from our energy auditors who come into our offices that their customers want to know more about renewable energy," says Stanton. Builders or contractors who offer renewable energy credits along with a healthy, sustainable, and energy-efficient home—the builder pays the first year to offset carbon emissions and the homeowner can take it from there—will set themselves apart from the competition. And offering renewable energy credits as incentives will help the public to recognize that home performance contractors are green contractors.

Here's how it could be done. Energy auditors or home performance contractors can use the calculators linked from www.ClimateSAVE.com to inform customers of their approximate carbon footprint. The calculators show how many pounds of CO_2 can be avoided by making changes in energy use through simple efficiency measures. Then, after the contractor's work is done, renewable energy credits can be purchased or given to the customer to make up the balance. That's one less dirty footprint.

—Jim Gunshinan

*Jim Gunshinan is **Home Energy**'s managing editor.*

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

To find out more about CSG's renewable energy credits, visit www.ClimateSAVE.com, call (800)689-7957, or e-mail info@climatesave.com.