

For each individual in the typical household this would average 2.3 tonnes, of which 1.2 tonnes is from heating the house, 0.4 tonnes from heating water and cooking, and 0.7 tonnes from general use of electricity for lighting and appliances.

Many people are surprised at the importance of heating to most homes' carbon footprint, and clearly there are big hits to be made here. You can cut heating-related emissions by 40 per cent or more by replacing an inefficient old-style boiler with a condensing model, by improving house insulation, and by turning down the thermostat by 2 °C in winter. But the biggest gain here can be from installing a wood-burning stove in your living room. These are attractive features and heat the house using a renewable fuel. Such a stove could cut household emissions by 2 tonnes of CO₂ per year or 0.9 tonnes per inhabitant, on average.

You can halve the emissions for heating water and cooking by cutting out baths, taking short showers (no power-showers please - they are as bad as baths) and by using a microwave or pressure cooker. You can also halve electricity bills. The big four energy guzzlers in most households are refrigerators, tumble dryers, computers and lighting. Of these, the tumble dryer is the worst offender. Using it for 1 hour less per week could cut a household's annual emissions by 0.07 tonnes, and cutting it out entirely will double that saving. A computer left switched on through waking hours but turned off at night will be responsible for up to 0.4 tonnes of CO₂ in a year. Switching to a laptop, which is more energy-efficient, could save you 0.2 tonnes.

Switching to energy-efficient light bulbs is another smart move, saving 0.25 tonnes for a household with 25 bulbs. A digital TV set-top box on standby uses enough energy to emit 0.06 tonnes of CO₂ in a year (roughly the total emissions of an average citizen of Burundi), so you can save most of that by unplugging every time you switch off the TV, and maybe half if you switch off only at night. And think about all the other kit you leave on standby. Get rigorous about unplugging every time and a typical household can save another 0.1 tonnes. It is small compared to some other savings, but significant nonetheless.

A final option is to buy into green electricity tariffs. Read the small print, though, because some companies are simply asking you to subsidise what they are already obliged to do by law. In the best schemes, however, you will be helping to ensure that more wind turbines and other green sources of electricity are built. The annual carbon savings from these greener energy sources could be as much as 0.8 tonnes of CO₂ per person.

In the UK, road transport accounts for nearly one-sixth of a typical citizen's emissions, or about 1.8 tonnes per head. In the US, at 5.6 tonnes per head, it makes up more than one-quarter of a rather larger total. The average car there, carrying an average of 1.2 people, emits 556 grams of CO₂ for every person-kilometre. A typical British car, also carrying 1.2 people, emits less than half this, at 180 grams of CO₂ for every person-kilometre travelled. There are numerous ways of getting these figures down. The average American driver could save a whopping 2.5 tonnes per year by changing to a gasoline-electric hybrid car. In the UK the gains would be lower, but still significant, at 0.8 tonnes. Buying a smaller, more efficient car running on diesel or liquified petroleum gas could cut emissions by 0.4 tonnes per car per year. Turning off car air conditioning can save 0.1 tonnes, while driving moderately and at the most fuel-efficient speeds will enable some drivers to cut emissions by 0.2 tonnes a year.

Another idea is to delay buying a new car. A typical car takes between 3 and 5 tonnes of CO₂ to manufacture. That is twice what it typically emits in a year. So even if the new model would be more fuel-efficient, it is probably better to put off buying it.

The bottom line, of course, is that we should all drive less. Getting rid of the car would be best, but is rarely practical. Sadly, cutting out short journeys to the shops does little to cut emissions. For most people it will be less than 0.1 tonnes, though cutting out a daily short journey might double that saving.

Taking public transport to work makes a much more useful contribution. With every 1500 kilometres of commuting, you save 0.5 tonnes of CO₂. Public transport is generally a greener option, but there are exceptions.