

GHG Project Case Study

WRI and Innovations in Estimating Employee Commuting Emissions

In 1999 the World Resources Institute committed to “walk the talk” by reducing its emissions to “net zero” through internal emissions-reduction and efficiency measures in combination with external purchases of carbon credits to offset emissions from electricity consumption, paper use, and employee travel. WRI occupies leased office space and has no direct, scope 1, emissions. Each kilowatt-hour of electricity that the organization uses is “greened up” by ensuring that energy generated from clean, renewable sources is put into the electricity mix. By 2003, WRI emissions were 21 percent below its 2000 base year. WRI has reached its target each year since 2000.

Gathering data for some indirect sources, such as employee commuting, has been a key challenge. Employees are surveyed once each year to determine their average annual commuting habits. In the first two years of the initiative, WRI used an Excel spreadsheet accessible to all its employees on a shared internal network but had only a 48 percent participation rate. A simplified, Web-based survey that was downloaded into a spreadsheet improved participation to 65 percent in the third year. Using feedback on the survey design, WRI further simplified and refined the questions, made it more user-friendly, and reduced the time needed to complete the survey to less than a minute. The employee participation rate rose to 88 percent.

Designing a survey that was easily navigated and had clearly articulated questions significantly improved the completeness and accuracy of the employee commuting activity data. An added benefit was that employees felt a certain amount of pride at having contributed to the inventory development process. The experience also provided a positive internal communications opportunity.

Transportation-related emissions are the fastest-growing GHG emissions category in the United States, including commercial, business, and personal travel as well as commuting. By accounting for commuting emissions, companies may find several practical opportunities for reducing them. For example, when WRI moved to new office space, it selected a building located close to public transportation. In its lease, WRI also negotiated access to a locked bike room for those employees who cycle to work, and the building provided shower and changing facilities to all building residents. For some companies, telecommuting programs may also greatly lower commuting emissions by circumventing or decreasing employee travel.

WRI publishes a full inventory report each year which is available from its Web site at:

<http://climate.wri.org/wrico2inventory2003-pub-4070.html>.