



Research Findings

Two Thirds of Americans Say They Are Familiar with Carbon Offsetting, Though Most Don't Know Exactly What It Is

While Only One in Ten Have Ever Purchased a Carbon Offset, Just Over Half Would be Interested in Purchasing One in the Future

Washington, DC, April 9, 2018 — Two thirds of Americans (67%) who believe that their personal emissions have an impact on climate change say that they are familiar with carbon offsetting – the process of purchasing a carbon credit to compensate for CO2 emissions occurring elsewhere (e.g., to compensate for CO2 generated by one's yearly air travel or automobile use) – including one in ten who are extremely familiar with the concept (13%) and another 54% who have heard of it, but don't know exactly what it is. According to the recent online survey conducted by Ipsos on behalf of Cool Effect, those most likely to be familiar with carbon offsetting include men (75% vs. 59% of women), younger adults (75% of adults ages 18-34 vs. 63% of adults ages 35+), the more affluent (71% vs. 60% of those earning less than \$50,000), and those with a college degree (73% vs. 61% of those with no college degree). However, one third (33%) admit that they have never heard of this concept.

According to 2014 World Bank data, the average American adult will emit roughly 16.5 metric tons of CO2 annually¹. When asked to estimate the average amount of CO2 emitted by a typical American each year, just over a quarter estimated correctly saying they believe an adult will emit about 17 metric tons (27%). However, just as many incorrectly believe that the average American emits only 2 metric tons (27%), while another 35% also underestimate the amount of CO2 emitted, estimating that the average American emits roughly 8 metric tons. Only one in ten (11%) believe that Americans emit 85 metric tons of CO2 over the course of a year.

- Men (31% vs. 24% of women) and older adults (32% of adults ages 55+ vs. 23% of adults ages 18-34) are among the most likely to think Americans emit only 2 metric tons of CO2 annually. Those under the age of 35 (12%), along with middle aged adults (14% of adults ages 35-54) are significantly more likely to believe Americans emit 85 metric tons annually (vs. 7% of adults ages 55+).

When asked to estimate the cost to offset an individual's average yearly carbon pollution, respondents are most likely to believe this ranges from \$250-500 (37%). Roughly a quarter believe instead that offsetting an individual's average carbon pollution is less expensive, ranging from \$100-\$250 (23%), while just as many think this would cost between \$1,000-\$1,500 (24%). Fewer (16%) believe that it would cost over \$2,000 to offset an individual's average yearly carbon pollution.

Carbon Offset Purchases

Whereas most Americans have never purchased a carbon offset before (88%), one in ten report that they have (12%). Among those who have purchased a carbon offset, one in twenty (5%) say that they purchase these at least once a month, another 4% buy them at least once a year, while fewer (3%) have bought them before, but not on an ongoing/regular basis.

¹ The World Bank, "CO2 emissions (metric tons per capita)," 3 March 2018 <<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.ATM.CO2E.PC>>



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- Across demographics, those most likely to have purchased a carbon offset before include men (20% vs. 4% of women), younger adults (24% of adults ages 18-34 vs. 3% of adults ages 55+), the more affluent (15% vs. 8% of adults earning less than \$50,000 annually), those with children living at home (24% vs. 7% of those with no kids), and those with a college degree (18% vs. 6% of those with no college degree).

Though only one in ten have purchased a carbon offset in the past (12%), just over half say that they would be interested in purchasing a carbon offset in the future (51%). This includes 10% who are extremely interested and another 41% who are somewhat interested. On the other hand, just under half (49%) say that they are not interested in purchasing a carbon offset in the future.

- Reasons for being interested in purchasing a carbon offset include that they are good for/help/protect the environment (33%), to compensate for carbon emissions/reduce carbon footprint (10%), to help reduce carbon emissions/greenhouse gases/pollution (8%), and because they are seen to be generally good/great (7%). Other mentions brought up by those who are interested in potentially buying a carbon offset fall below this threshold.
- Disliking the cost/not being able to afford it (17%), feeling like they don't need it (11%), and thinking carbon offsets are not good/don't like it/not interested are among the most common reasons mentioned by those who are not interested in purchasing a carbon offset for feeling this way. Another 28% among this group say that they are not interested because they are not familiar enough/need more information. Other responses are mentioned by fewer.

About the Study

These are the findings from an Ipsos poll conducted March 9 - 14, 2018 on behalf of Cool Effect. For the survey, a sample of 1,428 adults ages 18 and over from the continental U.S., Alaska and Hawaii was interviewed online, in English. To qualify for the survey, respondents had to believe that their personal emissions have an impact on climate change. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll has a credibility interval of ± 3.0 percentage points for all respondents surveyed.

The sample for this study was randomly drawn from Ipsos's online panel (see link below for more info on "Access Panels and Recruitment"), partner online panel sources, and "river" sampling (see link below for more info on the Ipsos "Ampario Overview" sample method) and does not rely on a population frame in the traditional sense. Ipsos uses fixed sample targets, unique to each study, in drawing sample. After a sample has been obtained from the Ipsos panel, Ipsos calibrates respondent characteristics to be representative of the U.S. Population using standard procedures such as raking-ratio adjustments. The source of these population targets is U.S. Census 2016 American Community Survey data. The sample drawn for this study reflects fixed sample targets on demographics. Post-hoc weights were made to the population characteristics on gender, age, region, race/ethnicity and income.

Statistical margins of error are not applicable to online nonprobability sampling polls. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error and measurement error. Where figures do not sum to 100, this is due to the effects of rounding. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll has a credibility interval of ± 2.0 percentage points for all respondents (see link below for more info on Ipsos online polling "Credibility Intervals"). Ipsos calculates a design effect (DEFF) for each study based on the variation of the weights, following the formula of Kish (1965). This study had a credibility interval adjusted for design effect of the following ($n=1,428$, $DEFF=1.5$, adjusted Confidence Interval=4.5).

For more information about conducting research intended for public release or Ipsos' online polling methodology, please visit our [Public Opinion Polling and Communication](#) page where you can download our brochure, see our public release protocol, or contact us.

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« Game Changers » is the Ipsos signature.

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