

## Small steps help planet

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ASHEVILLE - Changing a light bulb may not seem like a big deal, but changing 13,000 of them could make a sizable dent in the greenhouse gases rising into the atmosphere over Asheville.

While temperatures are predicted to rise worldwide because of greenhouse gases, Western North Carolina residents may be able to help clean the local air and pump less carbon overhead through a new voluntary program called Appalachian Offsets.

"Carbon offsets are certainly not the answer to climate change or our reliance on fossil fuels, but (it) is a great educational tool that does make a difference," said Maggie Leslie of WNC Green Building Council, which oversees the new program.

Those small steps along with the use of other existing technologies could help stabilize the greenhouse gases by the year 2050 and limit the wide-reaching changes of global warming, according to the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Some business leaders nationwide see the challenge of climate change as a new economic opportunity. "I think the IPCC report is a call to action," said Jerome Ringo, president of the Apollo Alliance, an environmental group backed by the AFL-CIO and other labor unions. Policy makers should enact legislation to promote research and development for new jobs to stimulate the American economy, while reducing the dependence on foreign oil and fossil fuels, Ringo said.

The alliance estimates dollars invested in clean energy create more jobs than those invested in traditional energy sources.

An investment of \$30 billion per year for 10 years would create 3.3 million jobs and boost the gross domestic product by \$1.4 trillion, according to its analysis. The federal government would recoup the initial investment in increased tax revenues within the same 10-year period.

Western North Carolina could be poised to take a lion's share of those new jobs emerging in technologies for energy efficiency, said David Wallace, director of the WNC office of the state Energy Office. Concentrating on green building and energy efficiency in new homes or remodeling existing homes, Wallace said, "Homeowners can spend less money on utility bills and spend a little money on putting people to work locally."

### Appalachian Offsets

After reducing their energy consumption, homeowners and businesses can offset what carbon they do burn into the environment through the new Appalachian Offsets program

Carbon offsets aren't new. Many air travelers will pay outside companies to plant trees to offset the carbon put into the air by the fuel they use on a flight, but many of the programs have gotten a bad reputation for salvaging

bad conscience rather than actually reducing the use of fossil fuels, according to Maggie Leslie of the WNC Green Building Council, which set up the offset program.

"People can't just buy their way out of conservation. That's not what we're interested in, Leslie said. "We encourage people to reduce their energy use as much as possible and offset the rest."

At the Web site, you can calculate the amount of carbon you create by watching TV, heating your home, driving your car, or flying on business or vacation. A typical homeowner can generate a carbon footprint of 8 to 12 tons of carbon annually.

People can make a donation of \$15 per ton to the program, which will then offset the carbon with local programs.

The Appalachian Offsets' first initiative will be to install compact fluorescents in the Asheville Housing Authority's low-income rental housing. A single 13-watt compact bulb replacing a conventional 60-watt incandescent can save 425 pounds of coal over its lifetime. By replacing more than 13,000 bulbs, the Housing Authority could reduce carbon emissions by 3,790 tons and sulphur dioxide by more than 100 tons, Leslie said.

Businesses can participate with free energy audits from Waste Reduction Partners, which will oversee the Appalachian Offsets' carbon calculations, Leslie said.

Walker and Doug Silsbee of the Bend of Ivy Lodge took advantage of a Waste Reduction Partners audit and have committed to making their Madison County retreat carbon-neutral. They have also replaced light bulbs and hot water heaters, added weather stripping and other energy efficiency measures. They have paid offsets to national organizations, but are looking forward to having their money work locally.

"It's easy to let ourselves off the hook. To say I'll still drive my SUV and just write a check, and I'm off the hook," said Doug Silsbee. "We have to take robust measures to reduce our consumption, and then offset what we can't reduce."

For information on Appalachian Offsets, click on [www.AppalachianOffsets.org](http://www.AppalachianOffsets.org) or contact the WNC Green Building Council at [www.wncgbc.org](http://www.wncgbc.org) or call 254-1995.

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