

Let's make a deal, with CO2

By Rhea Wessel

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FRANKFURT: It's not quite "green" travel, but individuals and corporate executives who feel that their trips may be contributing to global warming can purchase carbon dioxide-emissions offsets from a number of environmental organizations. The groups help travelers compensate for the CO2 they create on business and leisure trips.

Climate Care, one such group based in Britain, helps travelers calculate the emissions they create on particular flights or with ground travel. For instance, travelers flying round-trip from Frankfurt to New York create 1.74 tons of CO2 emissions. This can be calculated easily on www.climatecare.org and other Web sites.

By purchasing an offset for about €16.55, the traveler can counterbalance the pollution he or she is responsible for creating. Once back on the ground, the "clean" travel concept can be taken one step further. Many travelers now have the option to book hotels certified for their environmental friendliness or rent fuel-efficient cars.

The small sums gathered from travelers who purchase offsets are pooled and invested in projects in the developing world that reduce carbon dioxide emissions. One example is a project in South Africa to install energy-efficient light bulbs in low-cost housing in townships. These light bulbs use less electricity than those typically installed, reducing the amount of coal that must be burned to fuel the electricity plant.

Mike Mason of Climate Care explains that compensation for emissions can happen anywhere in the world since global warming is, as the name suggests, a global problem. This means travelers can counterbalance the effect of a London to Sydney flight by supporting projects to buy efficient stoves in Bangladesh.

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€24, and they aren't optional. If a participant doesn't want to offset emissions, then he or she can book a trip with another company, Muirhead says. "The price is nothing in terms of the difference it could make," she said.

On top of travel-related carbon dioxide, Muirhead offsets the emissions she creates by running her business. With €105 to €150 a year, Muirhead compensates for the gas that fuels her car and the heat that warms her home office. "It's a really simple and cost effective way to make a contribution," she said.

Muirhead was first introduced to the concept of emissions offsets when she worked at Business in the Community, a charity that participated in emissions programs from the British environmental company Future Forests.

Christina Wolf, a manager at Schenker, offsets the emissions she creates with her daily commute by car to her office in Essen, Germany. Using a Web site called www.klimabalance.de, Wolf plugged in the number of kilometers she drives and other information about her lifestyle to calculate the appropriate amount of offsets needed each year. Klimabalance provided Wolf with a certificate that recognizes her contribution, and Wolf has it hanging on her office wall for all who are interested. She found out about the opportunity to offset CO2 from a friend, and Wolf

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passes the word whenever possible.

Wolf's job also gives her the chance to help clean up the air. Her department at Schenker, a logistics company, helps clients inventory their carbon dioxide emissions and find ways to reduce them. "If you reduce your emissions, you usually reduce your costs as well," she said.

Ingo Puhl is the founder and director of 500PPM, which operates the Klimabalance.de site from its headquarters in Karlsruhe, Germany. Puhl says his was the first group in Germany to offer voluntary emissions offsets, and the idea got a big public relations boost in 2002 when Klimabalance offset the travel of the German delegation to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa.

500PPM, which stands for 500 parts per million, is the level at which greenhouse gases should be stabilized in the atmosphere so that climate change remains manageable. The group is working to bring emissions offsets to mainstream air travelers. "We want travelers to be able to choose from a window or an aisle seat, an emissions offset or no emissions offset," Puhl said.

He is working with travel agencies to build the option into Web sites and get more agents to offer offsets during their sales pitches.

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