

# Give back what you take

There's nothing fleeting about the effects of offsetting carbon emissions. The benefits are obvious. By **Claire Halliday**.

**T**aking public transport is "greener" than getting behind the wheel solo in a petrol-guzzling vehicle. But for many, such as families and tradies who need to zip here and there at a moment's notice, cars are the way to go.

But how should we minimise the environmental impact? Offsetting carbon emissions could be the answer.

Des Horton is used to thinking about the environment. He is a water conservation specialist, involved in the development, monitoring and reporting of water conservation programs in the urban sector. In his private life, Horton, 49, pays \$40 per year to Greenfleet, an organisation that charges an annual fee to plant trees to neutralise damaging emissions from their cars.

"I regard my Greenfleet membership as a significant contribution, and something that I recognised I could do easily and readily," says Horton.

Horton, whom friends have described as a computer-based greenie, says people need to get to grips with eco living issues almost from a "selfish" point of view — that is, thinking about how it would impact personally — and not dismiss them as concerns of an idealistic, "misguided do-gooder" community.

"In suburban areas — probably all around the world — people have become very disconnected from the source of the things (they) use and how they get to (them), and unaware or unrecognising of the effect on the environment, individually and collectively," he says.

"We are already past the time when it is important to do something to reverse this trend; to look at the level of consumption of anything and everything and avoid, or minimise, consumption and then to do something positive to rectify the effects of what we do continue to use or consume."

Sara Gipton, 41, chief executive officer of Greenfleet (which was an idea that started in 1997), says that, as concerns about the planet's future grow, so, too, has interest in the idea of minimising the harm caused by our daily lives.

Even the airlines are taking note. Virgin Blue offers passengers the

opportunity to appease flight-guilt by contributing to an off-setting program that promises to counter emissions through a range of eco-friendly initiatives.

In the past year, says Gipton, private support for Greenfleet has grown by 90 per cent and corporate support by about 45 per cent.

"We have in excess of 10,000 supporters," she says. "We have planted in excess of 2.8 million trees since we started. This year, we will plant about 800,000. They're planted all around Australia. The support continues to grow. There is definitely a palpable change in the atmosphere."

Heath Tully, 24, is another convert to the concept of offsetting emissions. After watching Al Gore's documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, with a work colleague, Derek, his niggling itch to help the planet inspired him to start scratching.

"We wanted to do something, so we decided to sign up our cars," Tully says.

As a corporate regional manager and e-commerce manager with Saab Australia, Tully then took his thinking one step further.

"Initially I signed up as an individual, but have now involved the company I work for."

"Derek and I put forward a proposal to the team that, for every new Saab our dealer network sold, we should buy a one-year carbon emission offset from Greenfleet. Everyone agreed with the proposal. When we did the calculations, it works out to be tens of thousands of trees that will get planted each year as a result of doing this, which makes me feel rather proud and happy. I am glad that I have been able to make a contribution."

It is important, Tully says, to ease his worry about what the world will be like in 10 years' time, "let alone what it will be like in 60".

"Getting the offset just makes me feel a little less guilty every time I hop in the car," Tully says.

"I like the fact that the trees that get planted are native and provide homes for native animals."

greenfleet.com.au  
virginblue.com.au/carbonoffset



Heath Tully and a Bio Power SAAB.

PICTURE: GARY MEDLICOTT

## GREEN NEWS

### Paper flow

Too much information: that's what people are starting to think with the excess of material becoming available on how to buy water tanks, go for grey water, insulate effectively and make the whole house five-star green from the front door to the back gate. Where to start?

The former editor of *Period Home Renovator* magazine, Tamsin O'Neill, will this week launch the first issue of *green* magazine, independently published by Green Press. It joins another local, bi-monthly *G-Magazine*, launched in January, which deals with all sorts of lifestyle issues.

The new *green* mag, by contrast, is a house and garden design magazine focusing on sustainable architecture and landscape design in the Australian context, with an emphasis on cutting-edge style and comprehensive consumer-friendly information.

"There are many elements to building sustainably — scientific, social, even poetic," says O'Neill. "So my aim is to provide information and inspiration on all of them, then go one step further. I want to spread the word that sustainability can be an art — one



that is endlessly evolving and deeply satisfying." [greenmagazine.com.au](http://greenmagazine.com.au)

### Water world

While there may have been welcome drops of rain recently, the long-term trend is looking ugly: more droughts and extreme weather events are predicted as a consequence

of global climate change. And the cultural consequences of our changing relationship with water are expected to be huge. Which is why the Ian Potter Museum of Art, in partnership with the Office for Environmental Programs at the University of Melbourne, is putting on a forum this Tuesday (World Environment Day) titled "Dry earth and flooded plains".

Speakers include Dr Chris McAuliffe, the museum's director, and Professor John Langford, director of the uni's Melbourne Water Research Centre. Topics include the changing perceptions of water in the Australian landscape, how society should respond and the impact of how we value and use water.

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