

Appendix

Original Proposal and Discussion

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Original Proposal

Carbon Neutral System Dynamics Conferences

Allyson Beall

Environmental SIG

November 23, 2009

The System Dynamics Society partnered with Carbonfund.org as a means of offsetting the carbon emissions associated with the 27th International Conference System Dynamics Conference held in Albuquerque, New Mexico USA in July 2009. SDS took the first step in making this event carbon neutral by offsetting 15 tons of the conference emissions and encouraged attendees to offset their individual carbon impact as well. Although the conference had a climate centric theme, participants only offset a small portion of our carbon footprint, which when combined with the original 15 tons offset by the society came to a 10% total offset. Many participants noted that going online to offset their carbon was inconvenient and requested that the offset be a part of the registration fee.

International conferences have an especially high carbon footprint primarily due to people flying long distances. Other sources of emissions include hotel energy and food, and local transportation. Other than having a virtual conference one manner of reducing our carbon footprint is to purchase carbon offsets. Carbonfund.org helped us estimate our 2009 conference emissions at 900.9 metric tons based on statistics from the 25th International System Dynamics Conference held in Boston, July 2007. The estimate includes the number of attendees and their places or origin, number of hotel nights, estimated local transportation, estimated square foot of conference space and food provided by the conference. SDS has opted to average the total projected impact of our conference among the total number of projected attendees so as to not place a higher burden on those traveling from overseas. The price of offset for each participant at the 2009 conference was US\$15.27.

Due to low voluntary participation, the significant interest in having the offset part of the registration fee, and the overall feedback that becoming carbon neutral was a good idea; the Environmental SIG proposes that the Society add a carbon neutral fee to the registration fee with an “opt out” option for those who do not want to participate. The current price of ~US\$15.27 per participant should be enough to cover the conferences not held in the US unless those conferences start seeing the higher participation numbers that the US conferences experience or the price of carbon offsets changes significantly.

With the understanding that there would be added work by the home office to manage the offset we recommend the price of \$20 to cover that additional expense with any excess to go to offsetting the carbon footprint of the home office.

From: List for System Dynamics Society Policy Council Members [mailto:SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu]
On Behalf Of Zagonel, Aldo A
Sent: Tuesday, November 24, 2009 10:44 AM
To: SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu
Subject: Re: SDS Winter PC Meeting - Carbon Neutral System Dynamics Conferences

Dear Members of the Policy Council,

I'd like to bring to your attention a proposal by the Environmental SIG to institutionalize the Carbon Offsetting mechanism for the annual SD conferences, copied below.

We thought it was a great initiative by Allyson Beall and others, to put it in place for the first time at the Albuquerque Conference. This program aligns well with the underlying philosophy in the Society, both in terms of the effort to contain climate change, as well as the approach to "think globally and act locally."

This proposal goes a step further than what was done in Albuquerque, adopting a feature whereby non-participants "opt out." With this change in the procedure, we hope to raise significantly the percentage of registrants that offset their conference-related carbon emissions (see justification in the proposal).

We bring this proposal for discussion, and perhaps deliberation, at this Winter's PC meeting.

Thank you for your time and attention,

Aldo Zagonel
Sandia National Laboratories
aazagon@sandia.gov
(505) 284-6773

From: List for System Dynamics Society Policy Council Members [mailto:SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu]
On Behalf Of John Sterman
Sent: Tuesday, November 24, 2009 12:53 PM
To: SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu
Subject: Re: SDS Winter PC Meeting - Carbon Neutral System Dynamics Conferences

Making the default "opt out" is a good idea.

John

From: List for System Dynamics Society Policy Council Members [mailto:SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu]
On Behalf Of Bob Cavana
Sent: Tuesday, November 24, 2009 1:52 PM
To: SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu
Subject: Re: SDS Winter PC Meeting - Carbon Neutral System Dynamics Conferences

Thanks Aldo,

Perhaps we could include the carbon charge of US\$20 as part of the normal registration cost (i.e. compulsory add on in the budget process)?

This would fit well with the conference theme in Korea:
Beyond the Crisis: Greening Society, the Economy, and the Future

This would certainly fit well with SDS's image/reputation on environmental/sustainability/global issues.

Perhaps the Policy Council to discuss & vote on 3 options on a carbon offsetting cost of US\$20:

1. optional to opt in;
2. default in registration fee, and option to opt out;
3. compulsory as put of an increased registration fee.

Regards,
Bob

*A/Prof Bob Cavana
Reader in Systems Science
Victoria Management School*

From: List for System Dynamics Society Policy Council Members [mailto:SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu]
On Behalf Of Bob Eberlein
Sent: Tuesday, November 24, 2009 2:58 PM
To: SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu
Subject: Re: SDS Winter PC Meeting - Carbon Neutral System Dynamics Conferences

It is too late to include this in anything for the Korea conference- the registration fee will be imprinted in the registration brochure before the formal winter meeting begins.

Providing a choice to opt in or out would generate lots of extra work for the central office. That does not seem desirable. We should elect to include the carbon offset in the registration fee, or not. In principle I think including it is the right thing to do, but I worry about making the conference more expensive and, of course, whether the spending really does make a difference.

Bob Eberlein

From: List for System Dynamics Society Policy Council Members [mailto:SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu]
On Behalf Of Niro
Sent: Tuesday, November 24, 2009 2:50 PM
To: SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu
Subject: RES: SDS Winter PC Meeting - Carbon Neutral System Dynamics Conferences

Dear Prof. Cavana,

“compulsory” will be always a system intervention. “Optional to opt in” is better!

Sorry,

Niraldo

From: List for System Dynamics Society Policy Council Members [mailto:SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu]
On Behalf Of Erling Moxnes
Sent: Wednesday, November 25, 2009 4:15 AM
To: SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu
Subject: Re: SDS Winter PC Meeting - Carbon Neutral System Dynamics Conferences

I do not know the answer, but I think it is important to ask the question:
What is most important for the climate: as many participants as possible at the ISDC or reputation and abatements facilitated by carbon charges?
Since I am uncertain about the answer, I would go for voluntary.

Erling

Erling Moxnes
Professor, System Dynamics Group
Dept. of Geography, Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Bergen
<http://www.ifi.uib.no/sd/>

From: List for System Dynamics Society Policy Council Members [mailto:SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu]
On Behalf Of Deborah Andersen
Sent: Wednesday, November 25, 2009 8:53 AM
To: SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu
Subject: Re: SDS Winter PC Meeting - Carbon Neutral System Dynamics Conferences

Although I agree with the idea of carbon neutral I would also like to make this work neutral for the main office at conference time. What mechanisms will we put in place so that this is not one more thing that Roberta and staff need to do?

Thanks,
Deborah Andersen

From: List for System Dynamics Society Policy Council Members [mailto:SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu]
On Behalf Of Bob Cavana
Sent: Wednesday, November 25, 2009 10:39 AM
To: SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu
Subject: Re: SDS Winter PC Meeting - Carbon Neutral System Dynamics Conferences

hi Erling,
a very important & interesting 'SD' question!:
"What is most important for the climate: as many participants as possible at the ISDC or reputation and abatements facilitated by carbon charges?"

however, 'maximising participation at ISDC' and 'maximising abatements facilitated by carbon changes' are not necessarily mutually exclusive objectives
- because of SDS member's (and other SD contributions) historical & ongoing great work in the international climate change/sustainability debate it is important to get as many people to the ISDC as possible each year. Many of these people will return to their parts of the world and start/ continue contributing to this ongoing very important issue (i detect some feedback loops here!).

if we (ie SDS Policy Council) believe that the 'Carbon Offsetting mechanism' (US\$20/ISDC participant) is/will be going to a reputable and worthwhile organisation (ie can make a difference -Carbonfund.org ??) then i think it should be a compulsory and normal part of the ISDC registration fee.

if we are not satisfied that the agency we would donate the money to (ieCarbonfund.org ??) can make sufficient difference, then SDS could put the collected money aside for research/scholarships etc for work in this area.

if the carbon cost is part of our normal conference fee then it is much easier to get it reimbursed/or paid for by our employers (or sponsors)!

i doubt if US\$20 is going to have much impact on the individual's decision whether to attend a specific ISD conference or not (but i think SDS has a policy around 'hardship assistance' here).

now maybe (most likely!) the total ISD conference cost (fee/accomodation etc) is another ongoing issue for Policy Council!

regards,
Bob

A/Prof Bob Cavana
Reader in Systems Science
Victoria Management School

From: List for System Dynamics Society Policy Council Members [mailto:SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu]
On Behalf Of Jim Thompson
Sent: Wednesday, November 25, 2009 11:35 AM
To: SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu
Subject: Re: SDS Winter PC Meeting - Carbon Neutral System Dynamics Conferences

It seems that we have missed the opportunity to affect the registration fee for the current conference without having to print a new brochure with a revised policy... wasting what is already prepared. It also seems that this Policy Council cannot bind a future Policy Council to a decision. It would be reasonable to leave things as they are with a note to the next Council that the Council members consider the various policy options discussed here.

One of the assumptions, gently challenged by Bob E, is that carbon offsets purchased through carbonfund.org may not make a difference. We should do the work necessary to make policy based in the best information available, and it would make sense to do some auditing between now and the next conference decision.

Jim Thompson

From: List for System Dynamics Society Policy Council Members [mailto:SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu]
On Behalf Of Ulli-Beer Silvia
Sent: Thursday, November 26, 2009 9:06 AM
To: SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu
Subject: AW: SDS Winter PC Meeting - Carbon Neutral System Dynamics Conferences

Dear Member of the Policy Council

Normally I am a silent listener to your opinions. But the topic of paying for ISDC's externalities using the Carbon Offsetting process is too relevant for staying silent.

I suggest that we are looking for a most efficient way for this transaction for all our members and the Society-Office. Including it in the conference fee would be one way and then just have one transaction to the Carbon Offsetting Office by the Society.

We have seen that voluntary action is not effective (and socially not efficient) concerning Climate Change issues – and honestly the Carbon Offsetting cost would probably be not decisive in the decision for joining the conference or not (if I consider the many unique amenities the conference normally offers) .

I strongly argue for a Carbon Neutral ISDC that can be realized by an adequate financing system.

Best, Silvia Ulli-Beer

P.S. Today I had again a meeting where I heard that we need to do something about Climate Change, but when it came to real action the time and financial cost were considered too high. Is this not the normal behavior pattern that has driven us to the state of climate change thread we are facing now?

We need to make a difference.

From: List for System Dynamics Society Policy Council Members [mailto:SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu]
On Behalf Of Jay Forrester
Sent: Friday, November 27, 2009 10:39 AM
To: SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu
Subject: Re: SDS Winter PC Meeting - Carbon Neutral System Dynamics Conferences

To: Policy Council

There are a number of reasons to be very cautious about this proposal. I will list some of them.

1. Carbon emissions has become a very political matter. If a move such as that suggested comes to be judged as a political action, it could jeopardize the tax-exempt status of the Society.
2. I have not examined our constitution, charter, and by-laws, but this action may not be within the scope of the Society.
3. The proposal is sure to cause a major controversy within the membership, and I do not believe that such a debate will advance system dynamics.
4. The proposal to fight carbon emission is rather contrary to good system dynamics practice because it is trying to alleviate symptoms, rather than addressing causes. The fundamental causes here are rising population and rising industrialization. To talk about ways to limit population and economic growth are politically incorrect, but, until those two drivers are subdued, efforts to suppress symptoms will be a losing game. Were we to move into battling the symptoms of growth in population and industrialization rather than dealing with the causes, there are almost an endless list of such symptoms to be fought-- hunger, water shortage, wars to control land, etc., etc. These symptoms will continue to get worse, in spite of counter efforts, as long as the driving forces remain in place. As far as the two major driving forces are concerned, even they are probably not an issue for the Society as a society, but should be addressed by individuals acting in the future best interests of the world.

Jay Forrester

Posted to the SD Forum *AND* to the Environmental SIG bulletin board

Carbon neutral: including offsetting fees in registration

By Allyson Beall, Sun Nov 29, 2009

At the 2009 conference in Albuquerque the Environmental SIG offered participants the option to offset their conference related emissions. Since the conference we have seen a fair bit of debate as to why participation in the voluntary program was low and multiple requests for the SIG to propose to the policy council that the offset fee be part of the registration fee. A little over a week ago I sent in a proposal to the Policy Council for an “opt out” carbon offset as part of the registration fee. The PC meets in January which means, that in the short term we do not have the time to include the offset in the fees for the 2010 Conference. We will have the voluntary option available via the web link on the SDS registration site as we did for the 2009 conference. However, in the long term we can plan for discussion at the winter and summer PC meetings and for the 2011 conference. We hope that this thread generates comments from the Society at large.

From my synopsis of the discussion to date there are several issues at hand with opinions on all sides.

- 1) The potential for this to create extra work for the home office. An opt-out would require more bookkeeping etc.
- 2) Adding carbon offsets to the registration fee would more fully internalize the impacts of the conference.
- 3) This could be seen as a statement that would have impacts on the Society’s reputation.
- 4) Does carbon off setting work?

We will be compiling all of your responses, which will be made available for the January PC meeting.

Best, Allyson

Posted to the SD Forum

Carbon neutral: including offsetting fees in registration

By Aldo Zagonel, Sun Nov 29, 2009 2:44pm

Thank you, Allyson!

In your responses to this thread, it would be helpful if you were to address your views on the following premises:

1) The System Dynamics Society should (not) strive to hold carbon neutral conferences

2) If #1 is answered in the affirmative, carbon offsetting should be handled in the following manner:

Option A) Offsetting should be optional, with participants opting "in" voluntarily and directly with the provider (e.g., CarbonFund) --as was the case for the Albuquerque Conference

Option B) Offsetting should be optional, but already included in the registration fee, unless registrants choose to opt "out." The SD Society would collect the contributions and make a transfer payment to the provider (e.g., CarbonFund)

Option C) Offsetting should be mandatory and automatically included in the registration fee.

Obs: Options B and C would require the Society to handle the moneys raise and contributed, adding to the work done by the Society Office as part of the conference registration process.

Allyson's proposal, which I endorse, advances this initiative from Option A to Option B, for the purpose of increasing the participation rate, from less than 10 percent in Albuquerque to hopefully a majority (>50%).

Posted to the Environmental SIG bulletin board
Carbon offset fees as a part of SDS conference fees
By Stephen Sewalk, Monday Nov 30, 2009

Allyson may I suggest that participation was low not because people do not want to offset their carbon, but rather because carbon offsets are more of a gimmick than a reality.

The only way to minimize carbon output is to take actions that minimize carbon output. This requires more efficient travel options, car pooling, ensuring that lights are off when not in use, using energy efficient lighting, including eating vegetarian rather than meat. The best way to do so would be to have an online conference which minimized any need for travel, given that airline travel is one of the worst sources of pollution as it emits at very high altitude. Alternatively participants could offer to reduce their carbon footprint story as part of a conference website. Personally I have the most energy efficient lights, furnace and am looking at adding solar to my new home to get as close as possible to a 'real' zero carbon footprint.

The unfortunate reality is that carbon offsets are a creation of the Al Gore camp to justify having a lifestyle that does not connect to what is being said. People who buy them use them to justify having an SUV or Luxury vehicle that gets 10 MPG, travel exclusively on corporate jets (very large carbon footprint), use excessive energy in their homes and offices, and travel by limo rather than bus, subway or train.

To me signaling that we 'internalize' carbon using a gimmick rather than choosing a venue that minimizes carbon would not be a positive.

Some examples.

How do we pick locations for our conferences? Did we choose a location with the most direct flights to minimize airplane emissions from travel? Did we choose a location that could offer the most public transport to minimize emissions? Did we choose meals that do so? What about the building for the conference, is it lead certified? Finally, how about the hotel where participants are staying, are they the most energy efficient they can be? And finally did we choose a time of year which minimizes the need for lighting?

From: List for System Dynamics Society Policy Council Members [mailto:SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu]
On Behalf Of Bob Eberlein
Sent: Monday, November 30, 2009 8:00 AM
To: SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu
Subject: Re: SDS Winter PC Meeting - Carbon Neutral System Dynamics Conferences

Hi Jim,

Just a clarification here. This was not intended as a conference specific change, but rather to be an ongoing policy if acted upon. The first conference that this would apply to would be 2011 in Washington. A decision made during the winter PC meeting - (electronic voting) or the summer (in person voting) would be timely for that conference.

You are right, of course, that we can always change our minds, though inertia is a pretty amazing thing.

Bob Eberlein

From: List for System Dynamics Society Policy Council Members [mailto:SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu]
On Behalf Of Nathan Forrester
Sent: Tuesday, December 01, 2009 9:24 AM
To: SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu
Subject: Re: SDS Winter PC Meeting - Carbon Neutral System Dynamics Conferences

As a Past President of the Society, I feel compelled to weigh in on this carbon offset proposal.

I suggest that it is inappropriate for the Society to take a position on any political issue including human-induced climate change. The Society is a scientific organization, not a political advocacy group or an exercise on group-think.

The statement below is unwarranted: “This program aligns well with the underlying philosophy in the Society, both in terms of the effort to contain climate change, as well as the approach to ‘think globally and act locally.’”. The philosophy of the Society and the field of system dynamics have nothing to do with climate change. Neither is “think globally, act locally” a philosophy or motto of the Society. The field of system dynamics is about using a state variable approach to dynamic feedback modeling, particularly through computer simulation, to test and refine theories about the world. Although individual members may feel moved to advocacy in one area or another, the Society should promote only further exploration, challenge, and testing of any and all theories amongst its members.

The statement below also implies that the members of the Society share a common view with respect to the questions surrounding climate change. Members certainly do NOT agree on the facts, causes, or political implications of the many existing theories about climate.

Furthermore, The Society has no business promoting causes through bundled fees. If some attendees wish support carbonfund.org, that’s fine, but most of the conference attendees in 2009 voted with their money not to make such a donation. Personally, I fail to understand how paying \$20 to anyone affects the

carbon-neutrality of my activities. If I travel by airplane or automobile, I contribute to the burning of transportation fuel. Choosing to support the activities of a group like carbonfund.org is an independent decision I can make whether or not I travel.

I strongly object to the Society:

- 1) Taking any position with respect to global warming, climate change, or any other political issue, including my own pet ideas, and
- 2) Bundling a mandatory donation into the conference fee, whether it is called a “carbon offset” or anything else, and
- 3) Adding an optional donation to any cause (except, perhaps, the Society itself) to the registration and administration process

On a broader note, the drift toward political conformity and advocacy within the Society is disturbing. The Society will (and should) quickly slip into irrelevancy, if it becomes a platform for promoting a particular set of social or political agendas. I, for one, have found the recent conferences disappointing because so many papers present weak analyses of topics-of-the-day (e.g. global warming, climate change, sustainability, socialized healthcare, etc.). Even though I have been a professional SD practitioner all my adult life, at some point I may stop attending conferences and stop sponsoring the Society, if the trend continues.

Respectfully,

Nathan

From: List for System Dynamics Society Policy Council Members [mailto:SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu]
On Behalf Of Erling Moxnes
Sent: Wednesday, December 02, 2009 3:06 PM
To: SDS-PC@listserv.albany.edu
Subject: FW: SDS Winter PC Meeting - Carbon Neutral System Dynamics Conferences

Jay and Nathan Forrester argue well for not making carbon offsetting mandatory.

Announcing voluntary offsetting is not a problem as I see it, it is just a service to those that want to offset. This is particularly a good service if recommended organizations can be trusted to do a good job. Money spent on offsets also have a minor dampening effect on economic growth - as Jay calls for. Members could also be encouraged to support the SD Society - with our method we should be able to help recommend better climate policies.

Regarding low quality as Nathan mentions, this is a topic we work with in the Strategy Committee. Good ideas are welcome. Although widespread in most disciplines, we should be careful not to set lower standards for papers that have politically correct conclusions (within disciplines or regarding environmental issues).

My best,

Erling M.
President

Posted to the SD Forum

Carbon neutral: including offsetting fees in registration

By Richard Dudley » Thu Dec 03, 2009 7:04 am

I support options B or C.

How is this proposal moved toward implementation, or has that already been done?

Richard G Dudley

Ithaca, New York, USA

<http://pws.prserv.net/RGDudley/>

Posted to the SD Forum

Carbon neutral: including offsetting fees in registration

By Bill Braun » Thu Dec 03, 2009 2:40 pm

Before moving ahead with any option, would it be useful to understand why so few people supported the initiative?

I am not an experienced tax return analyst, so I may be off base (and happy to have that pointed out to me). By my read of Carbonfund.org's 2008 audited financial statement ([http://www.carbonfund.org/site/uploads/ ... -Audit.pdf](http://www.carbonfund.org/site/uploads/...-Audit.pdf)) only 35% of its 2008 revenue went to program/project expenses. Compensation alone accounted for 23% of revenue. Between 2007 and 2008 28% of revenue (\$2.5M) has not been distributed to fulfill mission and purpose. If my read is correct, I would be discouraged from participating in such a program. I would want my contributions put to better use.

Bill Braun

Posted to the SD Forum

Carbon neutral: including offsetting fees in registration

By Thomas Fiddaman » Mon Dec 07, 2009 2:48 pm

This doesn't look great. Unfortunately it's hard to find comprehensive ratings of offset providers (links here, [http://www.co2offsetresearch.org/consum ... tings.html](http://www.co2offsetresearch.org/consum...tings.html)). It's possible that there are other explanations for the apparent low program expenditure ratio though. You'd expect high overhead in a startup, as all providers are. There are also long approval pipelines for projects, so you'd expect to see a lot of cash retained. This does at least leave me inclined to shop carefully though.

Posted to the SD Forum

Carbon neutral: including offsetting fees in registration

By Aldo Zagonel » Thu Dec 10, 2009 1:09 pm

Answering Richard Dudley's question:

How is this proposal moved toward implementation, or has that already been done?

This proposal has NOT been formalized into a motion. At this point, Allyson and I are simply encouraging conversation and discussion, in this Forum (for the Society members at large), at the Environmental SIG bulletin board (for those keenly interested in environmental issues), and within the Policy Council listserv (to assess if there is support to implement it).

As Allyson stated, the views presented in this Forum will be aggregated and made available to the Winter PC meeting, and will help contribute to the decision to move forward (or not).

Bill Braun points to an important aspect involving offsets.

Are they verifiable?

That is, how do we know that the money donated is being invested in the ways that it was supposed to? What percentage of the contribution is reaching its purpose, as opposed to being consumed by overhead, for example?

I was not personally involved in the choice to set up CarbonFund.com as our provider for this service at the Albuquerque Conference. We asked that members of the Environmental SIG help us sort through these issues, make a choice and set it up for us (as a separate opt "in" feature). To the extent my knowledge:

"Carbonfund.org is a carbon offset organization that is non-profit(1), durable and third party verified(2), used by reputable academic institutions(3), NGO's(4), and is endorsed by the Environmental Defense Fund(5)." (info provided by Allyson Beall)

Points 1-5 are substantiated at the bottom of this message.

Although, as you can see, deliberate thought and consideration was applied to this choice, it may need to be revisited, to the extent that problems with are identified and substantiated, and we come to learn about better alternatives. Perhaps another provider should be chosen to work with for the Seoul Conference. I don't know. I leave it to others, better informed than I, to make this evaluation.

In addition to verifiability, at least two other criteria are of utmost importance when evaluating offset options:

Are they durable?

Better investments are those which last the longest. Planting trees is a good thing in general, provided the current pace of deforestation. However, a tree will only sequester carbon while it is alive. Once it is chopped down or dies, it releases its carbon back in the environment. If the investment is going toward planting trees which are then being harvested for wood, it is not as effective as if it is for establishing a preserve, for example.

Are the offsets non compensatory?

One example of a loophole here is for a large land owner to dedicate a portion of his land as a preserve, receiving credits for it, but then cutting down everything around it for raising cattle. All of the offsetting did, in this case, was to generate money and good will for the rancher to raise his cattle. Conceivably, he was going to leave an area untouched anyway. Similarly, it does not alleviate the problem to finance wind and solar projects that were bound to take place anyway. Ideally, we should invest in things that would not otherwise happen.

I used examples which involve planting trees and preventing deforestation, but Carbonfund.com, as well as other organizations offer offsets to be applied to energy efficiency (e.g., better insulation), and non-carbon energy sources (notwithstanding the issues mentioned above regarding, for example, wind and solar projects.

I would like to conclude by encouraging all of us to educate ourselves on the subject of offsets, as they may be an effective mitigation option to slow down the pace of carbon emissions into the atmosphere, but they are not without their shortcomings and problems. The Wiki is a good place to start: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon_offset. (As a separate message, I include an abridged summary.)

While carbon offsets may treat the symptoms but not the true cause of the climate change problems we are experiencing (for those of us who believe there is a causal link between accumulation of green-house gasses in the atmosphere, and increasing global temperatures), it is still something that is within our reach to do in the context of our travel to the SD annual conferences.

This is not simply an individual issue and choice, however, to the extent that the Society promotes these conferences. Therefore we feel it is not only desirable, but actually recommended (or perhaps required), that the Society takes a proactive standing in affording a proper mechanism to address the problem that it is contributing to.

What we are proposing is primarily:

- a) That the SD Society declares as its policy, to strive toward holding carbon neutral conferences
- b) That in order to achieve this goal, it will begin including a carbon-offset fee (optional) in the cost of registration
- c) That, to preserve individual choice, and to respect differing points of view, anyone who does not wish to participate may opt “out” during the registration process

As of today, there have been 265 viewings of this topic on the Forum, but only three postings from people other than the proponents of this initiative. Please consider stating your views on this subject, asking questions, and otherwise taking part in this conversation.

Thank you,

Aldo Zagonel

References:

- (1) [http://www.carbonfund.org/site/pages/fa ... statements](http://www.carbonfund.org/site/pages/fa...statements)
- (2) [http://www.carbonfund.org/site/pages/ou ... _Selection](http://www.carbonfund.org/site/pages/ou..._Selection)
- (3) [http://www.carbonfund.org/site/pages/ou ... rs_schools](http://www.carbonfund.org/site/pages/ou...rs_schools)
- (4) [http://www.carbonfund.org/site/pages/ou ... nonprofits](http://www.carbonfund.org/site/pages/ou...nonprofits)
- (5) <http://innovation.edf.org/page.cfm?tagID=23994>

Posted to the SD Forum

Carbon neutral: including offsetting fees in registration

By Aldo Zagonel » Thu Dec 10, 2009 1:20 pm

The following text was abridged from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon_offset:

CARBON OFFSETS are a financial instrument aimed at a reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. There are two markets for carbon offsets. In the larger, compliance market, companies, governments, or other entities buy carbon offsets in order to comply with caps on the total amount of carbon dioxide they are allowed to emit. In 2006, about \$5.5 billion of carbon offsets were purchased in the compliance market, representing about 1.6 billion metric tons of CO₂e reductions. In the much smaller, voluntary market, individuals, companies, or governments purchase carbon offsets to mitigate their own GHG emissions from transportation, electricity use, and other sources. For example, an individual might purchase carbon offsets to compensate for the GHG emissions caused by personal air travel. In 2008, about \$705 million of carbon offsets were purchased in the voluntary market, representing about 123.4 million metric tons of CO₂e reductions.

Offsets are typically achieved through financial support of projects that reduce the emission of GHG. The most common project type is renewable energy, such as wind farms, biomass energy, or hydroelectric dams. Others include energy efficiency projects, the destruction of industrial pollutants or agricultural byproducts, destruction of landfill methane, and forestry projects. Some of the most popular carbon offset projects from a corporate perspective are energy efficiency and renewable energy, such as wind turbines.

Carbon offsetting has gained some appeal and momentum mainly among consumers in western countries who have become aware and concerned about the potentially negative environmental effects of energy-intensive lifestyles and economies. Offsets may be cheaper or more convenient alternatives to reducing one's own fossil-fuel consumption. However, some critics object to carbon offsets, and question the benefits of certain types of offsets.

Some disagree with the principle of carbon offsets, likening them to papal indulgences, a way for the guilty to pay for absolution rather than changing their behavior. Some environmentalists have questioned the effectiveness of tree-planting projects for carbon offset purposes. Some offset providers have been criticized on the grounds that carbon reduction claims are exaggerated or misleading. Because offsets provide a revenue stream for the reduction of some types of pollutants, they can in some cases provide incentives to pollute more, so that polluting entities can later get credit for reducing emissions from an artificially high baseline. Although many carbon offset projects tout their environmental co-benefits, some are accused of having negative secondary effects, such as negative environmental impact of hydrological dams. Offset projects may also have negative social impacts, for example when local residents are evicted to enable a National Park to be marketed as a carbon offset.

Posted to the SD Forum

Carbon neutral: including offsetting fees in registration

By Richard Dudley » Thu Dec 17, 2009 8:35 am

In Aldo's note he mentions that....

...Planting trees is a good thing in general, provided the current pace of deforestation. However, a tree will only sequester carbon while it is alive. Once it is chopped down or dies, it releases its carbon back in the environment. If the investment is going toward planting trees which are then being harvested for wood, it is not as effective as if it is for establishing a preserve, for example.

Just a comment: If we consider forests rather than trees then the issue is a bit clearer. Forests consist of an inflow of new trees and an exit of dying trees.... but there is always a stock of carbon in the forest dependent on the age/size of the trees. Although a forest preserve does store more carbon than a forest managed for harvest, the forest managed for harvest does store quite a bit (perhaps up to 65% of the total possible without harvest) and if we consider C stored in forest products.... long-lived products such as furniture and houses... then more is possible. While I don't believe that managed forests come under current climate agreements these issues are important in the C balance of forests, and are being considered.

OK not really relevant to the discussion of the carbon neutral conference. :-)

By Richard Dudley » Thu Dec 17, 2009 9:06 am

In Aldo's note he mentions that....

Just another comment about the sale of carbon offsets.

We have an image of our carbon offset payments being used to pay people to plant trees directly. But that is not the way the programs work. It is more akin to a financial market with financial "products" being marketed and those products are somewhat removed from an actual physical product. If that is correct, then it is not surprising that a reasonable proportion of the fund is used for salaries and related costs. In fact I don't see that percentage (was it 35%) being that high compared to other realms.... such as overheads charged by consulting firms or universities (which don't even include some salaries).

In fact one of the critical issues with REDD (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation) proposals with in the climate talks is the very high transaction costs related to figuring out payment schemes, verification, and monitoring.

Just a thought.