

Tech companies come to terms with carbon footprints as employees return to office

Article

The news: Working from home during the pandemic shifted energy use, but it did not reduce it significantly, [per](#) Protocol.

More on this: A [white paper](#) by **Steve Cicala**, associate professor of economics at Tufts University, studied the impact of one-third of the US workforce working from home in 2020, as well as the ramifications of the impending mass return to offices.

- Cicala learned that there was a nearly **8% increase in residential consumption of electricity**. Conversely, there was a 7% and 8% **reduction** in usage among commercial and industrial buildings respectively for both natural gas and electricity.
- As employees **moved outside city centers** for larger spaces and bigger homes, they **increased their carbon footprints**. Living farther away from city centers will also mean more gas consumption corresponding to longer commutes.
- Cicala noted that **gas consumption** for transportation **declined by 16%** in 2020, contributing to reductions in overall US energy consumption.

The grass isn't always greener: As tech companies come to terms with bringing employees back to office, as well as establishing permanent hybrid and fully remote workforces, they need to **assess whether they're just displacing energy consumption** onto their remote employees. Many tech firms are aspiring to become [carbon neutral](#), a few have ambitious [net zero goals](#); and some are even proactively offsetting the difference.

- **Autodesk** has balanced its employees' at-home energy consumption by purchasing offsets during the pandemic.
- **Square** [said](#) by giving employees the option for permanent remote work, it's helping reduce commute emissions.
- **Apple**, which claims [carbon-zero](#) for its corporate emissions, says it is reducing employees' carbon footprints by allowing them to work from home some days and by [encouraging](#) mass transit and shuttles.

The takeaway: As workers return to offices there will be an uptick in greenhouse gases and energy consumption. The pressure is now on businesses to better manage their collective company carbon footprint including that of their employees.

Range of Real Estate Cost Savings due to Remote Working According to Executives Worldwide, by Industry, Oct 2020

% of cost savings

	Range of real-estate cost savings	Total average
Public sector	28-48%	36%
Insurance	28-47%	35%
Retail	28-47%	34%
Financial services	26-45%	33%
Telecom	26-44%	33%
Energy & utilities	23-41%	30%
Consumer products manufacturing	22-39%	29%
Banking	21-39%	28%
Automotive	22-38%	28%
Industrial manufacturing	20-38%	28%
Total	25-43%	32%

Note: n=460 companies which anticipate real estate cost savings in the next 2-3 years
 Source: Capgemini Research Institute, "The Future of Work: from Remote to Hybrid," Dec 15, 2020

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