How to become **carbon neutral**

All it takes is a quick glance around the home office to realise that our very existence is polluting the world we live in. As I sit in air-conditioned comfort, a computer screen glares back at me. At work, there is a computer at each desk in my building. To my left, a printer churns out paper. Above, the lights are on, even in the rooms that I am not using. To my right, as I glance out the window, I can see city workers making the slow journey home in bumper-to-bumper traffic – it's the end of the day, and each one of us has left another footprint on the environment that collectively could be devastating on our world in years to come.

The choice to live clean and green may not fix the damage to our world over night. However, it is important for individuals to realise that reducing or neutralising their carbon emissions can make a significant difference.

So what would it take for a young lawyer to become carbon neutral?

Let's look at two common scenarios:

Scenario 1, Jason

Jason works at a city-based law firm. He lives with his girlfriend in a two-bedroom, one-bathroom apartment in Richmond. He uses a below-average 5000 kWh of electricity per year. Jason commutes to work each day by train. And, he uses his V6 car three times a week to get to the gym and visit mates (about 100km per week). Otherwise, he gets around on a tram.

Results

According to the "carbon calculator" (see **www.carbonneutral.com.au**), Jason would emit approximately 9.48 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year. This amount is considered to be lower than average. However, it would take 42 trees to offset his emissions! If Jason decides to take his girlfriend to Sydney during the year, the return plane trip increases Jason's emissions to almost 10 tonnes.

Scenario 2, Rebecca

Rebecca works at the same city-based law firm as Jason. She lives with her parents in their three-bedroom, two-bathroom home. She uses 6900 kWh of electricity per year – the average amount for an individual. Rebecca is faced with a daily commute in her small car from the Western suburbs (a round trip of 50km per day/250km per week). She also uses her car to get to tennis or the gym on weekends (an additional 30km per week).

Results

Rebecca is calculated to emit approximately 13.54 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year. This is higher than the average emissions of an individual (approximately 11 tonnes). It would take 59 trees to offset Rebecca's emissions. If Rebecca also decides to spend some time in Sydney during the year, an additional two trees will be required to offset the return plane trip.

If Rebecca was to purchase Jason's V6 vehicle, her emissions increase to over 15 tonnes if used over the same distances – requiring 67 trees.

What can you do to reduce emissions?

In a world that emitted around 7.9 billions tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere last year, Jason and Rebecca's environmental footprint is small. However, their carbon emissions are still affecting our environment. Although it may not be practical for Jason and Rebecca to take time off work to plant trees, there are many simple ways to reduce emissions, such as:

- use energy from renewable sources;
- make a monetary contribution to carbon reduction projects;
- recycle domestic waste; and
- purchase energy-efficient appliances.

Any of these steps will make a difference to our environment, and they can all be started today!

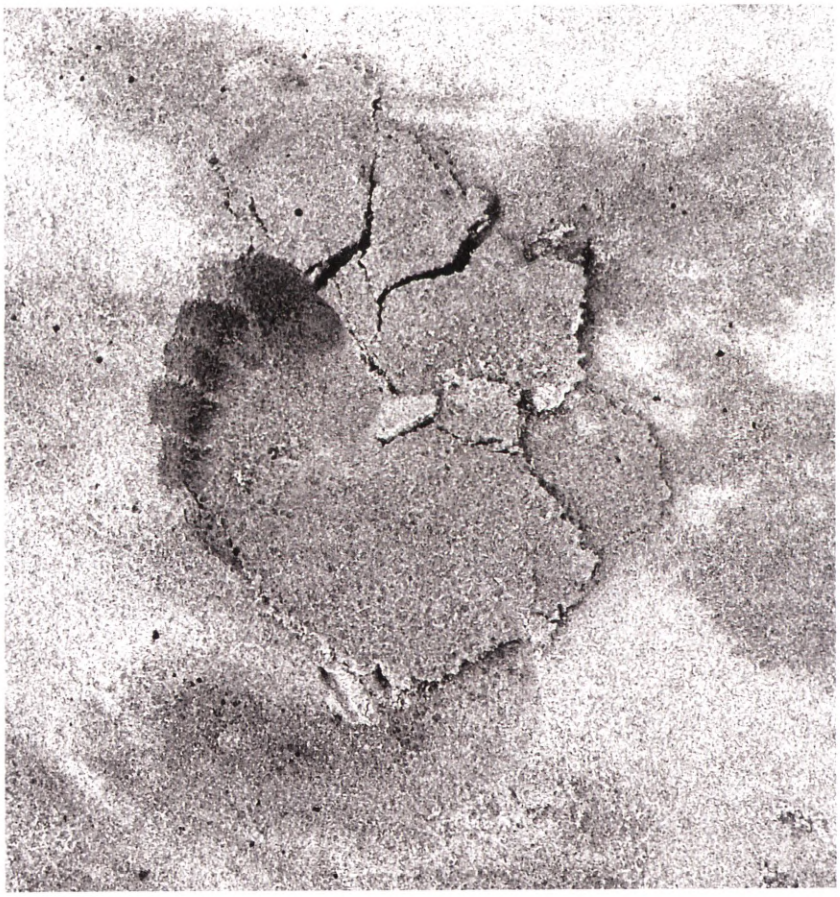

Photo: Kirby Young