



CARBON NEUTRAL STORIES

National Carbon Offset Standard and Carbon Neutral Program

Uniting Communities

Uniting Communities is a not-for-profit organisation that works across South Australia through more than 90 community service programs. Over 1,500 staff and volunteers support and engage with more than 20,000 people via a diverse range of services assisting the elderly, people with disabilities, youth and many others.

In 2010 the Uniting Communities Board committed to becoming carbon neutral and agreed to allocate resources to this goal. A policy and commitment statement was set and steering and working committees established. All staff were initially trained on climate change and asked for their ideas on carbon reduction. Towards Carbon Neutral, as the program was named, quickly became a popular initiative appealing to all areas of the organisation.

Over a period of five years of carbon measurement and reduction, carbon has become integral to every day work and resulted in a reduction in emissions of 34 per cent and savings of over \$1 million. This has principally been achieved through building upgrades, policy and procurement initiatives and behaviour change. Uniting Communities is the first South Australian organisation and the first registered charity in Australia to become NCOS certified carbon neutral.

The business case for obtaining carbon neutral certification

The desire to become carbon neutral originated from Uniting Communities' strong moral compass. Research shows it will be the elderly, socially disadvantaged and

low-income people who will be most affected—Uniting Communities' clients. Carbon neutrality also made sense from a number of other perspectives including the potential for operating cost savings, meeting funding commitments, enhancement to reputation, and the ability to report on the organisation's environmental impact.

Achieving carbon neutrality

Emissions Snapshot:

Scope 1: 461 tCO₂-e | Scope 2: 1,198 tCO₂-e
Scope 3: 789 tCO₂-e | Net total: 2,448 tCO₂-e

Carbon footprint

The scope of emissions across the organisation includes a total of around 85 sites, three of which are owned and the remainder leased. The carbon emissions from these facilities are calculated and aggregated by a carbon management system purchased in 2014. Uniting Communities' carbon footprint for 2014-15 was 2448t CO₂-e.

Emission reductions

An emissions reduction plan has been developed each year for the five years of the Towards Carbon Neutral Program to date and this will continue as required by NCOS. Significantly, capital and operating budgets have also been allocated by Uniting Communities each year.



Emissions reduction activities have fallen into the following areas:

- **Building Upgrades:** two aged care facilities and the head office have received a mix of lighting upgrades, temperature controls and enhanced insulation where these have provided robust business cases.
- **Policies, procedures and procurement:** Uniting Communities works with its suppliers where possible choosing those that offer lower carbon or carbon neutral products. Stationery, copy paper and fleet vehicles are fully carbon offset at the time of purchase with local South Australian plantings. A gradual conversion of fleet to hybrid-electric vehicles is almost complete.
- **Behaviour change:** carbon reduction themes have included switching off, driving green and reducing waste, paper and printing.

Measurement and monitoring has been a key aspect of this program and Uniting Communities has invested in the Envizi platform. Envizi enables data capture and regular reporting to managers on their area's carbon emissions thereby creating greater accountability.

Uniting Communities has received funding assistance from the Zero Waste SA and Conservation Council SA.

Offsetting

Uniting Communities has set a policy of purchasing a minimum of 50 per cent of its offsets from within Australia with the remainder to come from overseas offsets that fit with its social mission and budget. However, in 2015, 100 per cent of the offsets purchased were Gold Standard units from the biodiverse revegetation in the Yarra Yarra biodiversity corridor in Western Australia.

Benefits and outcomes of carbon neutral certification

Uniting Communities is now recognised as a leader in its sector for its commitment and achievements in reducing its carbon emissions. Tangible outcomes to date include:

- 34 per cent reduction in overall CO₂ emissions
- 29 per cent reduction in electricity usage
- 14 per cent reduction in fuel used by company fleet
- 76 per cent reduction in waste to landfill



An Australian Government Initiative

Approximate annual savings of \$330,000 amounting to around \$1,000,000 saved to date.

“This is truly an amazing achievement and a milestone for your sector ... this process has helped the organisation not only accept its environmental responsibilities but to strengthen its management accountabilities whilst saving money to put back into the very programs you are renowned for ...”

Steve Kostoff, CEO, Green Business Audit & Training

Challenges and learnings

There is no doubt that Uniting Communities has been an early mover with its decision to become carbon neutral under the NCOS. The main challenges have been to keep the program moving with limited resourcing and to embed it into the organisation's culture. Leadership commitment is crucial as is making low carbon an organisation objective and to integrate it into daily activities with our renamed program Beyond Carbon Neutral.

After the Uniting Communities Board's commitment in 2010, carbon expert and business sustainability consultant Suzanne Ridding was engaged to provide advice and to lead the program. Suzanne has played an integral role in the organisation's carbon neutral success and continues in this role to this day. Having a dedicated advisor has been an essential aspect of the Uniting Communities' achievements.

Green Business Audit & Training were also engaged to provide staff training on climate change and carbon with Sustainable Focus engaged to deliver all of the building upgrades.



Uniting Communities' 'We are Carbon Neutral' celebration: (L-R) Simon Schrapel (Chief Executive, Uniting Communities), Minister Simon Birmingham (on behalf of the Australian Government), Minister Ian Hunter (Minister for Climate Change representing the State Government), Sue King (Chairperson of the Board for Uniting Communities) © Copyright Uniting Communities