

UCS Sustainability Commitments

In order for UCS to be truly sustainable¹, our efforts to balance organizational needs with environmental impact need to be focused by a shared vision and plan. We have created these commitments so that our operational efforts toward sustainability will be more readily incorporated into our daily work.

For many members of the UCS staff and board, a sustainable approach to the organization is second nature and such a document, at first glance, may seem unnecessary. However, sustainability is a journey, not a destination. As we continue to grow and learn, it is important to have clear goals regarding sustainability and to operationalize these goals through specific commitments that will guide decisions throughout the organization.

This document aims to:

- outline clear commitments that can be easily communicated to staff, board, members and the public
- integrate organizational sustainability efforts throughout all areas of the organization
- enable us to measure and report our progress.
- quickly and easily train new staff about our sustainability commitments.
- model for other organizations how sustainability can be achieved at an organizational level.

UCS Commitments to Sustainability

1) Minimize Emissions

We commit to fulfilling the mission of the Union of Concerned Scientists with the least possible environmental impact, with particular emphasis on the organization's carbon footprint.

As an organization that is committed to preserving our natural environment, we currently engage in many practices to reduce our direct and indirect carbon emissions. For example, these include solar panels in our Cambridge office, energy efficient office spaces and lighting, energy star appliances and electronics, and an annual purchase of Renewable Energy Credits to offset our purchase of electricity. However, we intend to do better. We will develop and implement a 5-year conservation and emissions plan to further drive down emissions and use our annual carbon emissions inventory to measure success.

¹ Sustainable development is commonly defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (UN: Brundtland Commission, 1987).

We use 'sustainability' here to mean lowest impact balanced with UCS's functional requirements, i.e., efficient use of energy and water, consideration for biodiversity, low carbon usage, purchasing preferences for recycled (and recyclable) materials and/or manufacturing processes which contribute the least to air and water pollution, global warming and habitat destruction, and practices and materials that contribute toward indoor environmental quality.

2) Annual Carbon Inventory

UCS will conduct an annual inventory of carbon emissions associated with: electricity in our offices, natural gas usage, business travel, staff commuting, copy paper, and publications paper. On an annual basis, we will review other sources of carbon emissions (e.g., those associated with garbage, water use, transport of materials, cradle to grave use of electronics, and other office equipment and products) and determine if there are sufficient data available to track these in a meaningful manner.

3) Sustainable Operations

UCS is committed to sustainable operations. As such, we attempt to re-use materials until the end of their lives and have purchasing preferences for:

- recycled (and recyclable) products and materials
- products with low levels of toxics, specifically volatile organic compounds (VOCs)
- locally produced products
- manufacturing processes that contribute least to air and water pollution, global warming and habitat destruction

UCS has already made great strides with efforts such as the construction of green headquarters in Cambridge, MA, purchasing preferences for recycled paper and energy efficient products, and in-house policies such as recycling program for paper, glass, plastic, and metals for all offices. We will add new processes that are lower impact as they become available.

LEED certification will be one of the main elements we consider when looking for new office space, and we commit to its consideration being on par with size, location, and price. Where LEED certified buildings are not available, we commit to having Silver LEED Certified build-outs of new office spaces.

4) Carbon Neutrality

To minimize our carbon footprint, we will focus first on reducing our direct and indirect emissions, and then purchase Renewable Energy Credits and carbon offsets, that are both verifiable and additional, when they become available.

5) Promoting Our Efforts

We commit to sharing our sustainability efforts with our members and stakeholders through a regularly updated webpage based on this document and our most recent sustainability accomplishments.