

Fairchild Challenge 2008-2009
Option 3
OPINION PAPERS BASED ON RESEARCH

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The ongoing global warming and climate change problem is one that society is just beginning to realize. Because of this, it is extremely important for everyone and for the earth to begin to adapt to new, environmentally friendly practices that can help protect the earth from future danger and prevent climate change from inherently further affecting our damaged ecosystems. In an effort to help people realize exactly how much damage they have caused to what we call our home, several organizations and government sponsored programs have set up websites for people to calculate their “carbon footprint.” A carbon footprint is a measure of the total amount of carbon dioxide human activities emit into the atmosphere, which contribute to and only accentuate this ongoing environmental problem.

According to Suzane Lander in [The Earth Friendly Home](#), The main goal of calculating a carbon footprint is for people to realize just exactly how much harm they cause the earth by driving their car excessively, flying a round trip flight to New York, and even turning on their incandescent, energy inefficient light bulb. Since, according to the Brookings Institution, the United States has one of the highest per capita greenhouse gas emissions in the world, it is very important that websites sponsored by the government be created to help and promote eco-friendly ways to help preserve our environment and encourage people to reduce their carbon footprint. The two websites I believe are most effective at displaying and explaining the carbon footprint are www.safeclimate.net/calculator and www.3degreesinc.com/carbon_calculator.

The SafeClimate website, sponsored by the World Resources Institute, begins by explaining to the person calculating their carbon footprint exactly what a carbon footprint is. Their definition and method of explanation is extremely effective, providing a direct definition

along with a modern example. Besides from being a great informational source, the website is also physically distinct and appealing, making it very different among the other sites. It actually captures the person's attention and makes them want to continue. As one continues to fill in their information, it is evident that even though the calculation may not be extremely accurate, it still does take into account the two main producers of a person's greenhouse gases: home electricity bills and automobile use. By providing this information as accurately as possible, the calculator then estimates the persons monthly harm to the environment and displays a picture of what they do to the earth and then compares it to that of the average American.

Once a person has completed calculating their carbon footprint, however, the website does not begin to offer any more new insight into alternative methods of how people can reduce their environmental impact, even if their carbon footprint is low enough compared to the national average. This is probably a major detriment to this website because in order for people to learn how to reduce their carbon footprint, the website should offer alternatives to people, either by linking them to other websites or by promoting its own unique ideas. Another major problem with this website may also be that people expect accurate statistics be displayed so that they can compare their environmental impact to that of other people around the world and how they are enacting new and different methods to reduce their impact. For example, the website could mention how numerous developed countries have begun to enact environmentally friendly ways to produce electricity, such as through solar harnessing power plants and wind powered turbines. By doing so, the website can help demonstrate how other countries, and maybe even the United States, have begun taking initiatives to help and reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

Even though this website did offer good insight into what a carbon footprint consists of and what it is, the website sponsored by 3 Degrees Inc offers much more than just that. Aside

from calculating a person's carbon footprint and comparing it to the national average, this website even takes it to the next step by showing people how they can truly help reduce their carbon footprint and help the current state of the environment survive. One of the methods this website promotes is by offering Renewable Energy Certificates, or REC's. According to 3 Degrees Inc, the Renewable Energy Certificates "enable businesses and consumers to match up to 100% of their electricity with clean, renewable energy no matter where they are located and with the convenience of a single contract." By purchasing these REC's, consumers help generate funds that help promote the development of environmentally friendly power plants and energy sources and also help develop highly efficient components that are part of peoples everyday lives. Some of these projects include, but are not limited to Wind, Biogas, Solar Energy, Geothermal Energy, Landfill Gas, Biomass Energy, and even low impact hydro-electric energy production. By promoting the development of these efficient industries to produce electricity, the REC's demonstrate that energy can be created in a clean way that does not exactly have to harm our ecosystems. Besides from oil production and nuclear power plants, it is important for society to learn that they must help produce electricity in efficient methods that do not harm the environment and produce ridiculous amounts of greenhouse gases.

The 3 Degrees website also offers businesses and independent organizations the opportunity to calculate their carbon footprint using "best in world protocols." Even though the only way to do so is by contacting them through email, the Carbon Footprint Inventory helps these organizations find ways to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, set reduction targets, integrate changing practices that work to enhance their environmental conscience, and evaluate ways to implement these procedures without incurring any financial difficulties. As an example, the website demonstrates how a water bottling company based in Sweden acted in response to

changing consumer ideas of bottles and their harmful impact on the environment. By utilizing the Carbon Footprint Inventory tool, the company was able to analyze their true environmental impact, implement ways to reduce the harmful products the bottles are made from, and then implement these new procedures by reducing their costs and demonstrating their new products to consumers all around the globe. By doing so, this company was able to spur a global effort to reduce the amount of plastic used to develop water bottles around the world, from the USA to Australia. Among this project are many other projects that 3 Degrees was also able to help by analyzing their environmental impact, such as a wind farm in China, India, and even in the United States. This demonstrates that it has only contributed to the initiative of reducing greenhouse gases.

There are many more positive aspects of this website, such as an entire page dedicated to answering questions regarding climate change, ways to help the environment, and how renewable energy is being adapted everywhere in the world as this opinion paper is read. By providing answers to people who are new to the “environmentally conscious world,” this website helps people see how many different methods there are to become a leader in saving the earth for the future and may actually build up momentum for communities to adapt these new methods.

In my opinion, the many benefits of this website actually make it the best way for people to calculate their environmental contributions and at the same time analyze different methods to change their harmful habits. The only detrimental aspect of the entire website may actually be that the method used to calculate the carbon footprint may not be too accurate because it does not ask sufficient information to calculate the footprint in an extremely accurate way. By doing so, consumers may be more enticed to actually reduce their impact because of their commitment to putting in countless amounts of information.

After being able to surf the web and analyze the methods used to calculate carbon footprints, it is evident that there are numerous effective methods of calculating it; however, some are much better than others. By asking for more specific information, consumers may actually be enticed to truly conserve and better the environment; however, most people do not know how to find these statistics. By keeping it nice and simple, websites like 3 Degrees manage to integrate carbon footprints with methods people can adapt to actually work and reduce their impact, not just talk about it. It helps people take initiative to become aware of ways they can reduce their environmental impact just by writing a single check and contributing money to develop new and efficient ways of generating electricity for households to use. These simple websites help change consumer ideas on how they should help contribute to keep our earth clean from any harmful toxins and save it for our kids. Just remember, turn off the lights when not in use and calculate your carbon footprint!!!

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