

FAQ's

Austin Climate Protection Program



*The City of Austin received a national 2013 **Climate Leadership Award** from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and partner organizations. This award recognizes the City of Austin's outstanding achievements. We are the first City in the nation to be selected for this award. The information below was the basis for the award.*

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Where can I find information about the City's Climate Program online?

The Climate Program is managed by the Office of Sustainability. See our website:

www.austintexas.gov/sustainability and the Climate Program page

<http://austintexas.gov/departments/austin-climate-protection-program>.

Posted on the Climate Program website is our most recent [2012 Update](#) summarizing how Climate Action is progressing across City departments and operational units.

What is the City of Austin's municipal GHG reduction goal?

A goal of "making all City of Austin facilities, fleets and operations totally carbon-neutral by 2020" was established in the Austin Climate Protection Plan Resolution of 2007.

What municipal functions are included in the "neutral by 2020" goal?

It applies to all City facilities, fleets and operations. The City of Austin employs over 12,000 employees, operates over 500 facilities, and has a fleet of 4,695 vehicles. It consists of over 30 departments and

offices. It owns and operates its own public electric utility, Austin Energy; a public water utility, Austin Water; and a landfill. The goal does not apply to emissions from Austin Energy owned power plants.

How aggressive is the Austin goal, compared to other cities?

According to the Carbon Disclosure Project, the City of Austin has the most aggressive municipal goal in the United States. Melbourne, Australia, is the only other major city in the world that has an equally aggressive municipal GHG reduction target.

What are the 5 major goals established by the 2007 Austin Climate Protection Resolution?

In 2007, the Austin City Council unanimously adopted the Austin Climate Protection Resolution. It directed City management to create plans and programs to “make Austin the leading city in the nation in the effort to reduce the negative impacts of global warming.” (Available on Climate Program web page.)

The resolution set forth the Austin Climate Protection Plan, which established 5 major goals:

1. Municipal Plan, charging all city operations to be carbon-neutral by year 2020;
2. Utility Plan, reducing total energy use to 800 MW and increasing renewable portfolio to 35% of its power mix by 2020;
3. Homes and Buildings Plan, enforcing efficiency on current homes, buildings, and new construction;
4. Community Plan, to set targets for community GHG reductions and develop a plan to meet them;
5. Go Neutral Plan, to provide tools (such as offsets) for Austinites to mitigate their own emissions.

What protocol does the City of Austin follow to quantify its GHG emissions?

The City adheres to the Climate Registry's Local Government Operations Protocol and General Reporting Protocol. We report GHG emissions to The Climate Registry annually. Our report is publicly available at: www.crisreport.org/web/guest/analysis-and-reports. (To download our public report, click “Standard Reports,” then “Entity Emissions Summary,” then complete for City of Austin.)

In addition, we report to the Carbon Disclosure Project (www.cdproject.net) and are featured as one of 73 cities around the globe included in the “Measurement for Management” CDP Cities 2012 Global Report. Links to all of these documents are provided on our City website; see the Climate Program page on “Reporting Integrity & Protocols.”

How is GreenChoice power, from Austin Energy, part of the City’s GHG reduction strategies?

As described in the 2010 GHG municipal inventory, the City purchased over 75,000 MWh of GreenChoice energy, avoiding 37,500 metric tons of CO₂-eq. That amount increased to over 255,000 MWh in 2011, avoiding 137,000 metric tons of CO₂-eq.

By the end of 2012, the City of Austin was projected to purchase over 400,000 MWh annually, avoiding over 220,000 metric tons of CO₂-eq.

What other key initiatives & operational strategies does the City of Austin employ?

Climate Program staff have worked with 23 City departments, and 5 major City facilities, to develop tailored departmental Climate Action plans to reduce GHG emissions. These plans address each department’s unique operations in the topics of energy, water, transportation, waste, purchasing, and education. Today, the implementation of these plans is continually monitored and the results tracked and reported by the Climate Program. Annual performance evaluations for city department directors include a review of their department's progress toward specified goals for reducing their carbon footprints.

The City has made climate-action education available to it more than 12,000 employees, and it has trained a large proportion of its work force. A new online training is now being made available.

Are offsets included in the City's GHG reduction strategies?

No offsets have been included in the City of Austin's GHG inventory, to date. However, we do anticipate needing offsets to reach our goal of carbon neutrality by 2020. We are working to create local offsets to meet some or all of this need, through our PICC program (see below.)

In which national/international organizations does the Office of Sustainability participate?

Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN)

The City is a core member; Zach Baumer, Climate Program Manager, is the City's representative. We work with this network of over 100 U.S. cities to advocate for solutions to sustainability challenges, including reducing GHG emissions on the national scale.

C40 Cities, Climate Leadership Group

We participate as an Innovator City in this network of large and engaged cities from around the world, working on climate change issues. Our Chief Sustainability Officer and Climate Program Manager participated in the 2011 C40 Climate Leadership Summit in Brazil.

STAR Community Index

We have been actively working to develop the Star Community Index, the nation's first voluntary framework for evaluating and quantifying the sustainability of U.S. communities based on standards and tools built by and for local governments. The City is one of 10 pilot cities selected nationally; we provided seed funding for the index. Dylan Siegler from the Office of Sustainability is a member of the STAR Steering Committee and part of the Business Planning advisory team.

Green Consortium

The City of Austin and over 35 organizations within the Austin area are engaged in environmental education, stewardship, and green school construction. Mary K. Priddy, Climate Protection Coordinator, is a member of this community organization, aimed at strategic collaboration for maximizing resources and impact for area schools.

The Climate Registry

The City of Austin is a founding member of the Climate Registry. The City began its relationship with the Registry in 2007, following its membership with the California Climate Registry.

ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability

The City of Austin is an ICLEI member and periodically works with ICLEI staff on climate planning and implementation of national best practices.

What are examples of Office of Sustainability collaboration with community organizations?

Positive Impact on Climate and Community (PICC)

In 2012, the Office of Sustainability initiated this new program, and gained the participation of major local festival and event organizers -- including SXSW and the Austin City Limits Festival. These events offer a huge audience for raising awareness about climate change and funding offsets. The participating

events and festivals cumulatively attract over 1,000,000 attendees; all will now have the opportunity to add a green fund donation (including 3rd party verified carbon offset purchase) to ticket purchases.

PICC will fund both third-party-verified GHG reduction projects, in Texas, and small projects in Austin that deliver broad sustainability and community benefits, as well as GHG reductions. The third-party-verified projects will follow defined protocols, meet specific standards, and result in measurable reductions in carbon emissions. Examples include landfill methane gas destruction, organic waste composting or digestion, and renewable energy projects.

SXSW Eco

Since its launch in 2011, the City has participated with SXSW on this new Austin conference to promote sustainable solutions and best practices. SXSW Eco is a three-day conference that attracts international speakers and participants; it addresses the need for a concerted, cross sector approach to solving the recognized challenges facing the economy, the environment and civil society. Chief Sustainability Officer, Lucia Athens, serves on the SXSW Eco Advisory Board.

Central Texas Sustainability Leadership Forum

Co-founded a local/regional information-sharing network of Sustainability Officers and green leaders from both the private and public sectors. Other members include Dell, AMD, Whole Foods, Seton, Rackspace, and The University of Texas at Austin. We confer and collaborate regularly with the Office of Sustainability at UT Austin, in particular.

What are examples of City of Austin projects/partnerships that help to reduce community GHG?

Mueller www.muelleraustin.com

We work collaboratively with master developer Catellus, and the Mueller community, on this redevelopment of city-owned land, on the site of a former airport. Mueller is a mixed-use urban village that is a model for sustainability; it earned first-generation LEED for Neighborhood Development certification as a pilot project. All construction has earned Austin Energy Green Building ratings and/or LEED certifications. To date, the development includes over 40 commercial projects totaling approximately 1.5 million s.f., 678 multi-family units, and 735 single-family homes.

Public-Private Partnership Developments

Each major redevelopment project on City-owned land includes high standards for sustainable design, operations, and best practices. Downtown these include the Seaholm District, incorporating the redevelopment of former industrial power and water plant sites (now in progress), and Block 21, now housing the W Hotel & Condos and ACL Live Studios, which achieved LEED Silver certification.

Pecan Street, Inc. www.pecanstreet.org

We are a founding member of the Pecan Street Project, now Pecan Street, Inc. Pecan Street Inc. is a research and development organization focused on developing and testing advanced technology, business model and customer behavior surrounding advanced energy management systems. Through it, we are helping to reinvent America's electric system.

A flagship effort is the Pecan Street Demonstration, a smart grid research project at Mueller. It is funded through a 2009 U.S. Department of Energy stimulus grant.

Vehicle Emissions: Long-range Planning

A three-year, collaborative community process resulted in the May 2012 adoption of our new Imagine Austin comprehensive plan, which prioritizes "compact and connected" development patterns. This policy direction is intended to reduce vehicle miles travelled (VMT's) and their associated emissions.

See: www.imagineaustin.net

The Transportation Department is also pursuing efforts to reduce VMT's, including Urban Rail and numerous congestion relief efforts. See: www.austin-mobility.com The City of Austin convenes continuously with regional organizations - including our Metropolitan Planning Organization and Council of Governments - on efforts to reduce regional VMT's and their associated emissions.

In 2012 the City co-founded the Downtown Austin Transportation Management Association, to work with employers to help employees and visitors reduce VMT's. The City also co-founded Project Connect in 2012, a cooperative partnership between Central Texas transportation agencies to realize the high-capacity regional rail transit system called for in CAMPO 2035. See: <http://connectcentraltexas.com>

Carbon Reduction Projects - Community Non-profits

Since 2010, the Office of Sustainability provided grant funding for solar PV installations at the Yellow Bike Project, and at the M Station affordable housing development. We collaborate with TreeFolks to fund the planting of over 3,600 trees annually, and to educate the citizenry about the importance of our urban forest.

Austin Green Business Leaders

www.austintexas.gov/greenbusiness

Launched in March 2012 by the Office of Sustainability, this free program engages local businesses to complete a scorecard and document sustainable actions in seven categories (water, energy, transportation, resource management, community outreach, healthy work environment, and community stewardship). Businesses achieve ratings of silver, gold, or platinum.

How is Climate Program performance tied to the City budget?

Since January 2010, budget performance measures have been developed that are linked to departmental carbon footprints. The City has established 62 carbon footprint budget measures as an indicator of operational performance. Each department has at least 2 budget measures that are evaluated by department directors, managers, and staff. This financial perspective allows departments to plan and project their future activities while striving to reduce their GHG emissions.

How is the City of Austin addressing reductions to community-wide GHG emissions?

The need to do our part locally for global climate action, by reducing GHG emissions in Austin and Travis County, has informed a broad set of City long-range strategic plans developed since 2007. Office of Sustainability staff, supported by University of Texas at Austin researchers, are actively engaged in collecting data on the GHG reductions projected to result from the actions captured in these plans. They include the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan, the Bicycle Plan, the Zero Waste Plan, and the long-range plans adopted by Austin Energy and Austin Water.

Once that data is compiled, the projected reductions will be compared against internationally recommended targets for suggested community reductions by milestone dates. Additional strategies are being explored that can help to more fully reach those aggressive targets.

How is the City of Austin developing climate resiliency?

Climate Change already “in the pipeline” will lead to significant impacts for Central Texas, even if global GHG emissions are substantially reduced. Climate Program staff currently are in early-stage explorations of potential climate adaptation and resiliency measures (no actions were specified in the 2007 Plan). Based on the most current scientific findings, and a review of climate resiliency efforts in other leading cities, the Office of Sustainability will work to identify projected long-range community needs, as a basis for emerging recommendations and a future-oriented action plan.

What are examples of local climate change impacts?

Summer 2011 in Austin was the hottest and driest on record, and the wildfires that resulted from those conditions were the worst ever seen in this area. 2011 data exceeded what models of temperature and precipitation changes are predicting for 2050, with temperature increases of 2.5-4 degrees F and precipitation changes of +/- 1-2 inches. The ongoing drought is giving Central Texas hands-on experience with living and working under new climate extremes.

For energy and water, what specific impacts can we anticipate in Central Texas?

Austin Energy anticipates facing increased demand for uninterrupted and affordable energy. Austin’s climate is projected to experience longer droughts and heat waves, which will make it difficult for residents to cool homes and buildings continuously. It will put vulnerable segments of our community at risk. As weather-related disasters are projected to increase, we will face a higher rate of downed electrical lines and potential service interruptions.

Austin Water is preparing for a growing population and spread of development into new areas, which will place greater demands on the water system. Increased demand for water will consume more energy for pumping water and wastewater. Heavier storms will increase the severity of floods, potentially damaging infrastructure, and stressing the water treatment system. Longer and hotter droughts will diminish the availability of potable water by decreasing water reserves and increasing evaporation. It will become more difficult to provide constant clean water for residents. These issues are also being addressed by LCRA and the Texas Water Development Board.

What are three ways Austin companies and organizations can follow the City of Austin’s example?

- Choose 100% renewable energy: [GreenChoice®](#)
- Join us in reporting verified GHG emissions to one or both of these groups:
 - The Climate Registry www.climateregistry.org
 - Carbon Disclosure Project www.cdproject.net
- Sign up and achieve Gold or Platinum status as an Austin Green Business Leader: austintexas.gov/greenbusiness

