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Environment

June 21, 2004

The Other Low-Carb Life

Forget the diet. The latest thing is tracking -- and paying for -- your personal CO2

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LIKE MANY upstanding citizens, Guy Dauncey dutifully files his own tax returns. But the Victoria-based environmental consultant and author takes the annual ritual an unusual step further. When he gathers his receipts for car travel, airline flights, home heating and electricity, Dauncey takes the opportunity to calculate how much carbon dioxide he has spewed out into the atmosphere. For example, he goes to *Chooseclimate.org* and plugs in the start and end points for all his flights. The site then spits out his portion of the CO2 released by each jet. In 2003, Dauncey's personal carbon emissions totalled 13.5 tonnes. Using the going rate of US\$10 a ton, he signed up to do US\$135 worth of work for the Solar Electric Light Fund, a U.S. organization that helps African villagers switch from dirty kerosene lamps to clean solar power. "I consider those aspects of my personal lifestyle to be carbon-neutral," says Dauncey.

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"Carbon what?" you may well ask. Take note: the phrase is increasingly popular among planet huggers. It's early days yet, but a growing number of people are looking to lower their impact on the environment by striving for carbon neutrality. To make up for the greenhouse gases they produce by driving, mowing their lawns or heating their homes, they invest in climate-friendly technologies such as solar energy, finance the planting of trees to



absorb carbon or opt for products whose makers are committed to minimizing emissions, as with certain brands of carpets and CDs.



Not surprisingly, the carbon-neutral movement has already acquired some star power. Bands like Coldplay, the Rolling Stones and the Matthew Good Band have all staged carbon-neutral concert tours by investing in green projects to offset the carbon released as they travel to their venues. Meanwhile, a partnership between environmentalists and scientists has produced *ClimateStar.org*, an anti-global-warming Web site that features a "carbon footprint" calculator and promotional ads featuring actors Orlando Bloom, Kevin Bacon and Mischa Barton from *The OC*, among others. Filmmakers are getting into the act as well. Backers bill *The Day After Tomorrow*, the climate-change disaster flick now in theatres, as the first carbon-neutral movie. Director Roland Emmerich spent US\$200,000 on tree planting to make up for the 10,000 tonnes of CO₂ the crew created by flying, driving and cooking.

Susan Hall, head of the Climate Neutral Network in Portland, Ore., says people have long felt that climate change is too big an issue for individuals to affect. That's changing now that marketers are harnessing the consumer desire to pitch in. Today it's possible to take a carbon-neutral flight, book a carbon-neutral vacation or have carbon-neutral groceries delivered to your home. In North America, Stonyfield Farm yogourt and nutritional products from Shaklee Corp. are backed by assurances of carbon-neutral manufacturing. Giant carpet-maker Interface Inc. has also gone low-carb on some of its products. The firm used to sell only to businesses, but so many consumers expressed interest in its eco-friendly carpets that it now sells them on-line in Canada. Dauncey, for one, feels this is just the beginning. "Being carbon-neutral should become a standard practice, same as using the blue box."

This is a promotional banner for Rogers Hi-Speed Internet. On the left, there is a logo for "ROGERS HI-SPEED INTERNET". To the right of the logo, the text reads "Order Rogers Hi-Speed Internet and get a FREE Vivitar Digital Camera". On the far right of the banner is a small image of a silver digital camera.

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