



The Road to Net Zero: Measure, Monitor, Act



It is no longer viable (if it ever was) for us as individuals and businesses to wait for others to deliver greenhouse gas (in particular Carbon Dioxide CO₂) emissions reductions, deliver on the Paris Agreement to limit temperature rise to 2°C (preferably 1.5°C) compared to pre-industrial levels, and the UK commitment to Net Zero emissions by 2050.

You may not think your contribution can have influence but the tens of thousands of businesses in a similar position to you can make this same statement. Of course, you will not be working in isolation when following this road, and I think increasingly acting as a 'good corporate citizen' will also enhance your relationships with customers and suppliers.

As a rural small business using oil for heating and with a worldwide installation footprint, we here at Chronos are in the initial stages of developing our own strategy, but also using our knowledge of [Smart Technologies](#), installation and support to work with others keen to see reductions in their carbon emissions.

What Is Net Zero?

There are a few key phrases used in the world of emissions reduction, including 'zero carbon', 'carbon neutral' and 'net zero'.

Zero Carbon is self-explanatory. Your system does not emit any carbon at all. New build eco homes using solar panels and heat pumps are an example of zero carbon. Most enterprises will not be building from scratch and so zero carbon is not a realistic goal.

Carbon Neutral is achieving a balance such that any carbon emissions you produce are offset by carbon reductions elsewhere.

A commitment to Carbon Neutrality should not excuse you to continue as you are though, and the purchase of "carbon credits" (for example a tree planting scheme elsewhere in the world) should not be a satisfactory response to global heating. There is mounting evidence that the carbon reduction claims for several projects are overestimated.

Net Zero builds on Carbon Neutral, bringing with it a commitment to reduce your carbon emissions as much as you can and to offset the remainder of your emissions to contribute to permanently take carbon from the atmosphere. This Net Zero Carbon

often then includes emissions of methane, nitrous oxide and hydrofluorocarbons for Net Zero.

Where to Start?

The First Steps

Key actions that can set you on the Net Zero path are as follows:

- Firstly, a commitment from the top that achieving Net Zero is a goal for your business, and to put policies in place to achieve it.
- Calculate your current Carbon Footprint. There are useful online tools available, such as the [Carbon Trust SME Carbon Footprint Calculator](#), to get underway with this. This process should give you a real insight into the factors that contribute to your carbon footprint, and the extent to which you will need to work with others (such as transport providers) to meet your goals.
- Capture the Carbon Footprint of your facilities and processes and gain an insight into the systems and behaviours that contribute to this footprint. Much of this data may already exist in current systems but may need bringing together to help make overall sense – a “dashboard of dashboards” for a holistic view of your operations.
- Get your staff onboard. Management commitment alone will not deliver your goals. Success is found through education and empowerment of staff at all levels and across all disciplines. It may be useful to set up a ‘Green Team’ tasked with developing ideas to meet your commitments.
- Develop an Action Plan to deliver on your Net Zero commitments, with targets, responsibilities, and completion dates.
- Consider certification to standards such as the Carbon Trust’s Route to Net Zero Standard or the [SBTi’s Net-Zero Standard](#).

Key Areas of Focus

These initial activities will become the bedrock for your progress to Net Zero. You should find insights you never considered by correlating unrelated data. There are usually key areas though where early impacts can be made, including:

1. Facilities efficiency: heating and air conditioning are often big sources of energy waste, and the deployment of Smart Technologies can help reduce this waste. Data 'linking' across systems can also show where behaviours can be altered to increase efficiency. Increased efficiency through altered behaviours
2. Use of renewable energy: whether that be generation by you or suppliers, or the mix of energy sources used by your energy supplier
3. Transport emissions usually account for the majority of your Carbon Footprint. This not only includes transport of goods but business travel and indeed how your staff travel to and from work.
4. Reduce waste through re-use and recycling
5. Carbon Offsetting

Three-Pronged Approach

This then leads to the three areas of your operation that will deliver your Net Zero aspirations.

Direct Emissions

Carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions generated in your facilities and processes. Work to reduce emissions and continually develop your Action Plan to implement change. Consider low or no carbon products if you are a manufacturer.

Indirect Emissions

Work with your supply chains to quantify your indirect Carbon Footprint, even taking an influencing role with these partners to aid their emissions reduction. As with your direct emissions, develop Action Plans with your supply chain.

Carbon Offsets

Consider offsetting only after your own direct and indirect reduction strategies are in place. Work on an offsetting strategy; prioritising local offsetting projects; and use only high-quality verified projects that create genuine carbon reduction.

Summary

A commitment to Net Zero, or to start on the road to Net Zero, will need the support and contributions of many people inside and outside of your company, to succeed. There will be inevitable change on the way, and a key indicator of a successful project will be change that you didn't even consider would make a difference.

Building on your commitment you must measure whatever you can, however you can, to establish your baseline and then use those insights to develop plans to reduce Carbon Footprint. Monitor that data, both to ensure your actions are delivering what you plan and to give further insights into how those plans can develop.

Net Zero project will bear fruit even in the short term specifically through the cost reductions and added efficiencies you'll receive through those direct emissions.

