

# BEING A ONE TONNER

The One Tonners, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire



A One Tonner display stall (Source: Cathy Green)

*It's been said that only small groups of thoughtful, committed people have ever changed the world. If that's true, what does that mean for fighting climate change? Cathy Green thinks this means we have to stop waiting for governments to figure out what to do and just get down to doing it. Cathy started a movement and a related online blog, called 'The One Tonners', to lead the charge for reducing our personal carbon footprints from an average of 5 tonnes to a single tonne – the generally-accepted level of carbon emissions considered sustainable. Cathy tells us more about The One Tonners:*

## **Why did you start the One Tonners?**

I have very serious concerns about climate change and what it will mean to humanity and species we share the planet with. The decision to start the One Tonners was driven by the complete lack of action from international and national politics and the appalling coverage that climate change is given in the media.

Most people are not motivated by scientific facts and scare stories, and I wanted to present the solutions in a very positive way that would appeal to people rather than put them off. I also wanted to reach out to the general public rather than those who were already climate change campaigners. I want to get across the idea that we all have to live on a personal carbon allowance to mitigate dangerous global warming, but also that many of the measures we have to take are easy and painless.

## **Why are we limited to one tonne? Where does that number come from?**

The One Tonners is based on the concept of 'Contraction and Convergence' (C&C), devised by Aubrey Mayer of the Global Commons Institute. C&C says that the only fair global solution to climate change is to decide a safe level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and then divide up an allowance of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions between everyone on the planet.

C&C is about equity and fairness. The concept states that developing countries have the right to increase their emissions as the countries in the West contract their emissions, so that all countries would, in time, converge and be emitting the same level of CO<sub>2</sub>.

**“Your personal carbon emissions are the ones you can control that come from your house and your personal travel. The agreed safe amount of emissions that individuals can emit is about 1 tonne per year. This is the underlying idea behind the One Tonners.”**

*Cathy Green*

### **Why did you decide to start a blog?**

I started a blog because it was easy to set up, and it's an online way to advertise my events. I don't really use it like a blog, and I have been trying to set up a proper website for the last 6 months. I now find Facebook a much more user-friendly way to promote the One Tonners but you need lots of friends to make it really effective!

### **How did people respond to your call to action?**

The One Tonners' launch in February got off to a flying start with over 60 people attending the main presentation on how to calculate your carbon footprint. There was also an impressive presentation given on everything you can do to reduce your footprint around the home. It was a lively event featuring exhibitions, music videos, a library of books and loads of useful leaflets.

### **What other types of outreach are you doing?**

As well as doing events involving public speaking, our outreach activities have also included distributing leaflets around local outlets; developing a relationship with the local newspaper, and doing radio and newspaper interviews; and gathering a group of student and green activist volunteer helpers to leaflet shoppers in town on a Saturday.

I think outreach is really important because a lot of green movements and groups concentrate on raising awareness among people who are already interested and committed. I think it is important, if we are to stand a chance of seriously tackling climate change, to reach the 90% who aren't already engaged.

### **What lessons have you learnt from the experience?**

That for most people (even the 10% who are already aware!), climate change means recycling and, at a push, composting or over-packaging! They do know that it means less travel and no flying and insulating their homes and not shopping at supermarkets but they don't want to change the way they live.

I have also learned that you really need to tailor the message about low carbon living and climate change differently depending on who you speak to, and you almost need a different strategy for each individual person in the world!

I have learned not to give up but to keep plugging away despite the lacklustre response from most members of the public, and that it is important to make people feel empowered and to emphasise the importance of political action as well as personal action.

### **So what do you do to live sustainably?**

My partner and I gave up flying over 3 years ago because we felt too uncomfortable with the level of environmental damage that our holidays were causing. We now either holiday in the UK or take the Eurostar to Europe and have also stopped travelling unnecessarily in our leisure activities.

We buy seasonal local produce from the local farmers market and get a weekly veggie box. Our diet is mainly vegetarian as most emissions in food are associated with livestock and water use. We walk or cycle to work and for all local trips within 5 miles. We have a compost bin in the

garden to compost all our kitchen waste as this waste releases methane which has 21 times the global warming potential of CO<sub>2</sub>.

We buy things we need from local charity shops. We recycle everything and take cloth shopping bags for carrying things. We get our electricity from a green electricity company. We buy A-rated energy efficiency products when electrical goods need replacing.

### **How difficult has it been to convert your lifestyle?**

The hardest thing is living in an old house with lots of draughts, so space heating is our biggest source of emissions during the winter. We would like to get solar hot water heating fitted but don't have the funds. This year, we didn't use the car for 4 months over the summer and didn't really miss it, and we made sure we took public transport whenever possible. This transition has been surprisingly easy although you can't always guarantee punctuality!

Last year, my partner and I came in at 1.25 tonnes each on our personal CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Our indirect emissions are harder to measure and include at least 1.7 tonnes each for 'infrastructure emissions', so overall we are nowhere near the ideal of one tonne overall, but it is a good start and we hardly live in unusually harsh living conditions!

### **What is planned for the One Tonners over the next 12 months?**

I am doing One Tonners events at the local University, including a talk next January I am doing for some students as part of their 'Environmental Action' course. In the spring, I will be helping to organise an open eco-homes day with other local green groups and individuals living in local eco-houses. During the summer, I will probably do stalls at local festivals and events as this has proved an effective way to reach people.

And for us personally in our journey to sustainable living, we plan to find the time to grow our own vegetables in the garden.

### **Facts and Information**

- Insulation is one of the most important ways to reduce your heat demand. Did you know that about 25% of heat in an uninsulated home is lost through the roof?
- Saving energy is a great way of saving money too – turning your thermostat down just 1 degree can save 10% on your heating bills. Low energy lightbulbs use a fifth of the electricity of incandescent bulbs and they last longer. In areas where you use them a lot, each bulb can save about £8 on your electricity bill each year.
- Embodied energy is the energy involved in the manufacture and delivery of materials. It is an important consideration when you consider the full lifecycle energy costs and gains from energy saving installations and purchases.
- The most effective way of keeping emissions low, taking into account the full lifecycle of electrical goods, is to offer the replaced product through the Freecycle network. In this way, the least efficient products still in use will be replaced, leading to an overall improvement in energy efficiency.

## Further Resources

- For more information about The One Tonners, visit their blog at [theonetonners.blogspot.com](http://theonetonners.blogspot.com).
- To find out more about energy projects in your community, contact the Community Action for Energy Team (CAfE) on 08701 261 444 or email [CAfE@est.org.uk](mailto:CAfE@est.org.uk) or visit their website at [www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/cafe](http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/cafe).
- To find out more about how to 'Save Your 20%', contact your local energy efficiency advice centre on 0800 512 012. Their trained advisors can provide information about the grants and discounts available for energy efficiency measures and renewables in the home.
- To find out more about all aspects of sustainable living, contact the Centre for Alternative Technology's free information service by email at [info@cat.org.uk](mailto:info@cat.org.uk) or call 0845 3308373 or 01654 705989.
- For more inspiration, visit the 100 Ideas House online to see what you could do to save energy: [www.100ideashouse.com](http://www.100ideashouse.com).

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