# Table of Contents

## Sustainability Indicators
- U.S. Environmental Footprint
- Biodiversity
- Social Development Indicators
- Carbon Footprint
- Environmental Justice

## Energy
- U.S. Energy System
- U.S. Renewable Energy
- Wind Energy
- Photovoltaic Energy
- Biofuels
- Nuclear Energy
- Geothermal Energy
- Unconventional Fossil Fuels
- U.S. Grid Energy Storage

## Materials
- U.S. Material Use
- Municipal Solid Waste
- Critical Materials

## Food
- U.S. Food System

## Water
- U.S. Water Supply and Distribution
- U.S. Wastewater Treatment

## Built Environment
- U.S. Cities
- Residential Buildings
- Commercial Buildings
- Green IT

## Mobility
- Personal Transportation
- Autonomous Vehicles

## Climate
- Greenhouse Gases
- Climate Change: Science and Impacts
- Climate Change: Policy and Mitigation
About the Factsheets

Purpose
Since 2001, the University of Michigan’s Center for Sustainable Systems (CSS) has developed a growing set of sustainability factsheets. They address important challenges facing society including such topics as energy security and declining fossil resources, global climate change, freshwater scarcity, ecosystem degradation, and biodiversity loss. In addition to highlighting these impacts, a series of factsheets are focused on the systems that provide basics services such as mobility, shelter, water, energy, and food. For each system, the patterns of use, life cycle impacts, and sustainable solutions and alternatives are presented.

Audience and Dissemination
The current suite includes 29 factsheets and covers a range of topics including waste, buildings, impacts, water, energy, food, materials, and transportation. The factsheets are an excellent resource for legislative aides in Congress and in federal agencies, business and industry, educational institutions ranging from middle schools to universities, and the public who are looking for concise information regarding sustainability challenges and solutions in the U.S.

Authors and Peer Review
The factsheets are developed by graduate student interns in collaboration with faculty advisors and research staff at CSS. These factsheets synthesize data from government agencies, national laboratories, academia, industry sources, and NGO publications. These statistics are reported as concise facts, tables and figures in a two page document. Sources for all data are cited; any derived values are documented in a data repository maintained by CSS. The factsheets are updated on annual basis, and new factsheets on emerging sustainability issues are also created. Factsheets are reviewed externally by subject matter experts and the CSS External Advisory Board.

List of Factsheet Authors

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About the Center for Sustainable Systems

The Center for Sustainable Systems (CSS) was established in March 1999 in the School for Environment and Sustainability (SEAS) at the University of Michigan. CSS is an evolution of the National Pollution Prevention Center (NPPC) that was created by an EPA competitive grant involving 28 colleges and universities in October 1991. The NPPC collaborated with faculty from a wide range of disciplines across campus and with other leading programs throughout the U.S. Indeed, NPPC was the foundation for many of the relationships CSS has today.

In 1997, NPPC’s Advisory Board approved a transition plan to launch CSS to better focus its mission on systems analysis and sustainability. Universities establish centers to ensure that disciplines and faculty that historically have not worked together do, in fact, work collaboratively in interdisciplinary teams on critically important problems facing society.

Since its inception as the NPPC, the Center has completed more than 150 research projects on topics such as renewable energy, hydrogen infrastructure, transportation, green buildings, consumer products and packaging. A complete list of projects and publications is listed on the Center’s website (css.umich.edu). Methods and tools employed in these research endeavors include life cycle assessment, life cycle design, life cycle costing, life cycle optimization, agent based modeling and big data. In addition, the Center has promoted sustainability education at the University of Michigan by initiating the Sustainable Systems field of study in SEAS, the graduate certificate Program in Industrial Ecology (PIE), and the Engineering Sustainable Systems dual Master’s degree program between SEAS and the College of Engineering. Finally, CSS has sought to reach a broader audience by publishing a series of factsheets on an array of sustainability topics, as well as organizing the Wege Lecture, one of the University’s premier lecture series.

Celebrating 27 Years at the Center for Sustainable Systems

1991  An EPA grant establishes the National Pollution Prevention Center (NPPC) at the University of Michigan.
1992  NPPC releases its first of 16 compendia (topic-based collections of bibliographies, syllabi and case studies) on pollution prevention.
1992  The NPPC external advisory board holds its first meeting.
1994  The EPA awards $0.5 million to NPPC for the development and demonstration of the Life Cycle Design Methodology.
1997  The external advisory board approves transition from NPPC to CSS.
1999  The graduate certificate Program in Industrial Ecology (PIE) is established under CSS guidance.
1999  The Wege Foundation pledges $1.8 million in support of the CSS endowment.
2001  The first annual Wege lecture is inaugurated by CSS.
2002  A prototype University of Michigan sustainability report is released by the Center.
2003  CSS hosts the biennial meeting of the International Society for Industrial Ecology (ISIE).
2003  National Science Foundation (NSF) awards CSS $1.7 million for study of sustainable concrete infrastructure (MUSES project).
2004  Provost recognizes CSS as a permanent University Center.
2005  Alcoa Foundation Conservation and Sustainability Fellowship program supports six post-docs researching Enabling Technology for a Sustainable Energy Future.
2005  SEAS Sustainable Systems Master’s degree field of study opens for fall enrollment.
2007  Engineering Sustainable Systems (ESS) dual Master’s degree program with the College of Engineering and SEAS is launched.
2008  His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama gives ‘Earth Day Reflections’ talk to 8,000 in Crisler Arena.
2010  Four new SEAS faculty join CSS.
2011  Jonathan Bulkley, co-director of CSS, retires after 43 years of teaching.
2011  Wege Lecture becomes an endowed lectureship.
2011  Jonathan W. Bulkley Collegiate Professor in Sustainable Systems is endowed.
2011  Peter M. Wege & Jonathan W. Bulkley Fellowship in Sustainable Systems is endowed.
2012  CSS sponsors Sustainability Without Borders student group.
2016  25th anniversary of the Center.
2017  School of Natural Resources & Environment (SNRE) becomes School for Environment & Sustainability (SEAS).
U.S. Environmental Footprint

The U.S. population is expected to grow from 329 million in 2020 to 404 million by 2060.\(^1\,\,^2\) One way to quantify environmental impacts is by estimating how many Earths would be needed to sustain the global population if everyone lived a particular lifestyle. One study estimates it would take 5 Earths to support the human population if everyone's consumption patterns were similar to the average American.\(^3\) Pressure on the environment will increase unless consumption patterns are significantly adjusted to account for the finite natural resource base. Factsheets expanding on the topics below are available from the Center for Sustainable Systems.

### Food
- The average American’s daily Calorie consumption increased from 2,054 in 1970 to 2,501 in 2010.\(^4\)
- In 2003, the average American consumed 46 gallons of soft drinks, a 330% increase since 1947.\(^5\) Between 1970 and 2017, per capita milk consumption decreased 46%, down to 12 gallons per year.\(^4\)
- The average American consumes about 356 calories of added sugars and sweeteners per day. The American Heart Association recommends limiting added sugars to between 100 and 150 calories daily for an average adult.\(4,\!^6\)
- U.S. per capita consumption of added fats increased by 66% from 1970 to 2010.\(^4\)
- Approximately 40% of U.S. adults and over 18% of adolescents age 12-19 are obese (BMI > 30).\(^7\)
- The EPA estimated that in 2017, more food was landfilled than any other trash material; around 22% of food ends up in landfill.\(^8\) The average American wastes 50% more food than in 1970.\(^9\) This waste accounts for roughly 15% of the municipal solid waste stream and represents a loss of $450 per person each year.\(9,\!^{10}\)

### Water
- In 2015, total water withdrawals in the U.S. for all uses were estimated to be 322 billion gallons per day, 9% less than in 2010. The biggest uses are thermoelectric power (41%), irrigation (37%), and public supply (12%).\(11\)
- Water use per person was roughly 48% higher in western states than eastern states in 2015, mostly due to crop irrigation in the west.\(11\) Over 50% of water withdrawals occur in 12 states, 9% in California.\(11\)
- The average North American household uses roughly 240 gallons of water daily for indoor and outdoor uses.\(12\)
- Households with more efficient fixtures and no leaks can drop their water usage to 40 gallons per person per day.\(12\)

### Material Use and Waste Management
- In 2000, per capita consumption of all materials in the United States was 23.7 metric tons, 52% more than the European average.\(14\)
- In 1900, raw material consumption was less than 2 metric tons per person.\(9,\!^{10}\)
- In 2017, the average American generated 4.5 lbs of municipal solid waste (MSW) each day, with only 1.6 lbs recovered for recycling or composting.\(9,\!^{10}\) For comparison, MSW generation rates (lbs/person/day) were 2.20 in Sweden, 2.98 in the U.K., and 3.71 in Germany.\(17\)
- In 2017, 35.2% of U.S. MSW was recovered for recycling or composting, diverting 94 million tons of material from landfills and incinerators—more than double the value from 1990.\(10\)
- Only 53% of Americans are automatically enrolled in curbside recycling programs. 82% of cities with curbside recycling collect material single-stream, meaning materials such as glass and paper are separated at the recycling plant.\(8,\!^9\)

### Greenhouse Gases (GHG)
- In 2018, U.S. GHG emissions were 20.4 metric tons CO\(_2\)-equivalent per person.\(20,\!^{21}\)
- From 1990-2018, total annual U.S. GHG emissions increased by 3.7%. Emissions from electricity generation, 27% of the U.S. total, are included by sector in the figure (at right).\(20,\!^{21}\)
- In 2013, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that "It is extremely likely (>95% certainty) that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century."\(22\)
- By choosing energy efficient products to reduce electricity consumption and by making smart transportation choices, individuals can immediately reduce the greenhouse gas emissions they are responsible for.
Residential and Commercial Buildings

- Since the 1970s, average residential living trends in the U.S. have been towards bigger houses with fewer occupants:
  - U.S. home size increased 41%.
  - Number of occupants per home decreased 15%.
  - Living space per person increased 66%.
  - Significant energy savings could be realized by better insulating residential buildings to reduce the space heating and cooling loads, using energy efficient appliances, and using more efficient lighting in commercial buildings.
  - Commercial building average site energy intensity per square foot decreased 18% from 111,000 Btu/sqft in 1979 to 100,200 Btu/sqft in 2019.
  - The amount of developed U.S. land increased by 60% from 1982 to 2015, making up 6% of total U.S. surface area in 2015.

Transportation

- In 2018, the U.S. had 273.6 million vehicles, 46.0 million more than licensed drivers.
- Drivers traveled over 3.2 trillion vehicle-miles in the U.S. in 2018, a 112% increase since 1980.
- This is equivalent to more than 6.5 million round-trips to the moon.
- Compared to 1988 models, the average 2018 vehicle’s weight increased by 26%, horsepower increased by 96%, and acceleration increased (i.e., 0-60 mph times dropped) by 40%.
- Fuel economy surpassed 1988 levels in 2009 after years of decline.
- The average vehicle occupancy for a passenger car is 1.5, compared to 8.0 for a transit bus and 25.8 for a train.
- Congestion is a worsening urban problem, causing an additional 8.8 billion hours of travel time, 3.3 billion gallons of fuel use, and 64.7 billion pounds of CO2 emissions by urban Americans in 2017.

Energy

- In 2018, the U.S. spent $1.3 trillion on energy, or 6.2% of GDP. When spread over the population, annual costs were $3,891 per person.
- More U.S. energy comes from petroleum than any other source, comprising nearly 77% of consumption.
- Each day, U.S. per capita energy consumption includes 2.6 gallons of oil, 9.7 pounds of coal, and 25 cubic feet of natural gas. Residential daily electricity consumption is 11.8 kilowatt-hours (kWh) per person.
- With less than 5% of the world’s population, the U.S. consumes 17% of the world’s energy and accounts for 15% of world GDP. In comparison, the European Union has 6% of the world’s population, uses 11% of the world’s energy, and accounts for 16% of world GDP; China has 18.1% of the world’s population, consumes 2.4% of the world’s energy, and accounts for 18% of world GDP.

1. U.S. Census Bureau (2020) “U.S. and World Population Clock.”
Biodiversity

Biodiversity, or biological diversity, is the variability among living organisms from all sources, including terrestrial, marine, and other aquatic ecosystems, and the ecological complexes of which they are part. Biodiversity shapes the ecosystem services that contribute to human well-being—material welfare, security, social relations, and health. Biodiversity is considered on three levels: species diversity, genetic diversity, and ecosystem diversity.

**Species Diversity**

- Species diversity can be measured in several ways, including diversity indices (species richness and evenness), rank abundance diagrams, and similarity indices.
- Of the estimated 8.7 million eukaryotic species (complex cells) on Earth, 86% of land species and 91% of ocean species have not yet been described.
- 1.2 million species have been described globally.
- 51,136 plant and animal species are listed in the U.S.; top-ranking states for species diversity are CA, TX, AZ, NM, and AL, respectively.
- Freshwater habitats account for only 0.01% of the world’s water and make up less than 1% of the planet’s surface, but they support one-third of all described vertebrates and nearly 10% of all known animal species.
- One study suggests polar waters, not tropical reefs, are hotspots of fish speciation—contrary to much of the previous thinking about evolution.

**Genetic Diversity**

- Genetic diversity refers to the genetic variation within species (for both the same population and populations living in different geographical areas).
- Individuals within a species have slightly different forms of genes through mutations, where each form (an allele) can code for different proteins and ultimately affect species physiology.
- Genetic variations lead to differences in both genotype and phenotype, which are necessary for species to maintain reproductive vitality, resistance to disease, and the ability to adapt to changing conditions.

**Community/Ecosystem Diversity**

- Ecosystem diversity describes the variety of biological communities and their associations with the ecosystem in which they are part.
- Within ecosystems, species play different roles and have different requirements for survival (i.e., food, temperature, water, etc.). If any of these requirements become a limiting resource for a species, its population size becomes restricted.

**Goods & Services**

- Ecosystem services are the conditions and processes that enable natural ecosystems to sustain human life.
- Ecosystem services include: air and water purification; mitigation of floods and droughts; detoxification and decomposition of wastes; generation and renewal of soil and soil fertility; pollination of crops and natural vegetation; dispersal of seeds and translocation of nutrients; protection from the sun’s harmful ultraviolet rays; partial stabilization of climate; and moderation of temperature extremes and the force of winds and waves.
- Biodiversity improves several ecosystem services, including crop yields, stability of fishery yields, wood production, fodder yield, resistance to plant invasion, carbon sequestration, soil nutrient mineralization, and soil organic matter.
- These services provide us with food, natural fibers, timber, biomass fuels, crop pollination, medicines, psychological health, and more.
Loss of Biodiversity

- Since 1955, alteration of biodiversity related to human activities was greater than any time in human history, driven by habitat loss from agriculture and infrastructure, over-exploitation, pollution, invasive species, and climate change.1
- Climate change is likely to become the largest threat to biodiversity, partially because it affects areas uninhabited by humans.12
- Higher temperatures could increase drying, resulting in dieback in the Amazon, which has the highest biodiversity of all forests.25
- In August 2019, 76,000 fires burned over 7,000 square miles of the Amazon, an 80% increase in fires from August 2018.26 The 2019-2020 Australian bushfires are estimated to have killed nearly 3 billion native vertebrates.7
- Habitat loss increases greenhouse gas emissions; 8% of global emissions (8.8–9 GrC) derive from tropical deforestation. Tropical forests sequester 1.2 - 1.8 GrC yearly.8
- Over-fishing and harvesting also contribute to a loss of genetic diversity and relative species abundance of individuals and groups.19
- Up to 1 million species may be threatened with extinction in coming decades.20

Biodiversity Loss Due to Agriculture

- Of the 30 mammalian and bird species used extensively for agriculture, half account for over 90% of global livestock production.21
- Genetic diversity within breeds is declining, and 17% of 8,774 livestock breeds identified are classified as at risk of disappearing.22
- Of 30,000 wild and 7,000 cultivated edible plants, 30 provide 95% of dietary energy. Wheat, rice, and maize provide >50% of plant-derived calories, globally.29
- In the last 100 years, ~75% of the genetic diversity of agricultural crops was lost.24
- Productivity, stability, ecosystem services, and resilience are positively associated with species diversity in agricultural ecosystems.25

Extinction

- In Earth’s history, there have been five mass extinctions, defined as time periods where extinction rates accelerate relative to origination rates such that over 75% of species disappear over an interval of 2 million years or less.26
- Globally, 1% or less of the species within most assessed taxa are extinct. However, 20-43% of species in these taxa are labeled as threatened,46
- 196 plant and animal species have gone extinct in the U.S. and 2,274 are threatened or endangered.627
- Current extinction rates are higher than those leading to the five mass extinctions and could reach mass extinction magnitude in 300 years.78

Sustainable Actions

Policy

- The Endangered Species Act (ESA) (1973), administered by the Interior Department’s Fish and Wildlife Service and the Commerce Department’s National Marine Fisheries Service, aims to protect and recover imperiled species and the ecosystems they depend on.29
- 191 countries have National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plans for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.20
- Over 238,000 protected areas (such as national parks and reserves) have been established, covering nearly 15% of the land and 7.3% of the sea. The size of the protected areas is now more than 18 times larger than it was in 1962.20

Global Initiatives

- The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2021-2020 is a framework of five strategic goals and twenty targets adopted by the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2010.23 If current trends continue or worsen, these goals will not be achieved and other goals set forth in the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Vision for Biodiversity will be undermined.23
- The United Nations developed a list of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s) in 2015 that commit to preserving biodiversity of aquatic and terrestrial organisms, among other things. Fulfilling the SDG’s has the potential to greatly increase biodiversity and its associated benefits.33

12. UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) (2018) “List of Protected Areas.”
Sustainability Indicators

Social Development Indicators

Standards of living are difficult to measure, but indicators of social development are available. A basic measure, per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP), is the value of all goods and services produced within a region over a given time period, averaged per person. A more advanced metric, the Human Development Index (HDI), considers life expectancy, education, and Gross National Income (GNI). The three highest HDI-ranked countries are Norway, Switzerland, and Ireland. Many of the indicators discussed below are used to measure progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of targets agreed upon by United Nations member states as crucial for global human progress.

Population

- The 2020 U.S. population is 329 million and world population is over 7.6 billion.
- Global population is projected to reach 9.8 billion by 2050, with 6.7 billion people living in urban areas—a 68% increase from 2015.
- Significant issues affecting population include shifting mortality and fertility rates, gender equality, and youth education and employment.
- Fertility rate, or number of births per woman (of child-bearing age), is projected to fall from a global average of 2.5 in 2019 to 1.9 by 2100. Currently, Niger has the highest fertility rate at 7.0; the U.S. fertility rate is 1.8.
- Life expectancy averages 65 years in Least Developed Countries (LDC); life expectancy at birth in the U.S. is 79 years.
- Globally, contraceptive use is increasing. In 2019, contraceptive use was 1.7 times higher than in 1990 and is 6 times higher in LDC. However, more than 20% of women of reproductive age in 15 countries still do not have access to contraceptives.
- The population of sub-Saharan Africa is growing rapidly and may grow to over 3 billion people by 2100.

Standard of Living

- In 2015, 0.73 billion people lived below the world poverty line of $1.90 USD per day, down from 1.9 billion in 1990.
- According to the Gini Index, Slovenia, Belgium, and Norway have among the most equal income distributions in the world. There are over 100 countries a with more even income distribution than the U.S. (Gini index = 41.5).
- In 2018, 11.8% of the U.S. population—38.1 million people—were living in poverty (income under $25,465 for a family of 4 with 2 children). Hispanic and Black populations in the U.S. face higher than average levels of poverty (17.6% and 20.8%, respectively).
- More than 565,000 people were homeless in the U.S. in 2019.

Food

- Average expenditures on food as a percentage of income range from 14% in developed countries to 24% in developing countries in 2018. On average, Americans spend less than 7%, while Nigerians spend 59%.
- Globally, 45% of deaths of children under 5 are caused by undernutrition.
- The Green Revolution during the second half of the 20th century led to large increases in agricultural yields and helped feed the rapidly growing global population. Sub-Saharan Africa was the only developing region where increased food production was primarily due to increased crop area vs. increased crop yield.
- The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization publishes a comprehensive set of food security statistics annually.

Water and Sanitation

- Approximately 2.3 billion people lack access to proper sanitation. Access is lowest in sub-Saharan Africa, where only one in three people have proper facilities. Worldwide, urban areas have better sanitation coverage—83% have access to proper facilities, compared to 50% in rural areas.
- Only one quarter of people in LDCs have access to basic hygiene (soap and water).
- In 2015, 71% of the world population had access to clean drinking water at home, but 263 million people spent more than 30 minutes per round trip to collect safe drinking water. However, in Oceania and Sub-Saharan Africa only 40% and 43% of the rural populations, respectively, have access to improved water resources.
Healthcare and Disease

- Approximately 39% of deaths in 2016 were caused by communicable diseases.16
- Globally, 38 million people were infected with HIV and 770,000 died from AIDS in 2018. Most cases—20.6 million—are in eastern and southern Africa. The number of new infections declined by 41% between 1997 and 2018, but infection rates have increased in northern Africa, eastern Europe, central Asia, and Latin America.18
- Diarrheal diseases killed 1.6 million people in 2016 due to inadequate water, sanitation, and hygiene services. 446,000 children die each year from diarrhea. Greater than 70% and 55% of the infections are due to unsafe drinking water and sanitation, respectively.23
- In 2018, there were 228 million cases of malaria worldwide, with 93% occurring in Africa. 405,000 people died and 67% were children under 5.24 Research shows more populations will be at risk of malaria as climate change expands suitable habitat for disease-carrying mosquitoes.25 Since 2010, malaria mortality rates have decreased by over 38% globally, with the largest decline occurring in southeast Asia.24
- Indoor air pollution, caused primarily from smoke while cooking, contributes to 3.8 million premature deaths each year.26
- Cardiovascular diseases are the leading cause of death in the world. A healthy diet, regular physical activity, and avoiding tobacco could reduce the major risk factors associated with premature deaths from cardiovascular diseases and strokes.27
- In 2015, about 90 million people fell under the poverty line due to out-of-pocket health care costs.27

Education and Employment

- Global youth literacy has risen from 83% in 1990 to 92% in 2018. The gap in female and male literacy rates is also closing: in 1990, literacy rates were 87.4% and 78.3% for boys and girls, respectively. In 2018, the literacy rates were 93% and 91%.28
- Cuba spends the highest percentage of its GDP on education, devoting between 12-13% each year. The U.S. spends around 5% each year.31
- Sub-Saharan Africa primary school enrollment increased from 52% to 80% from 1990-2015; the 2015 world average is 91.5%.29
- In Low Human Development nations, 25% percent of the population has at least some secondary education. In Very High Human Development nations this metric is 89%.31
- Most jobs in developing countries are in agriculture (60%), services (27%), and industry (13%).24

Environment

- It is “extremely likely” (>95% certainty) that the majority of climate change is caused by anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions.30 In the 21st century, climate change will likely result in increasing extinction risk for plant and animal species, more flooding and coastal erosion, extreme heat, droughts, tropical storm intensity, and human health risks associated with malnutrition and water-related and vector-borne diseases. Declines in crop productivity in low latitudes and freshwater availability are likely. Poor communities are especially vulnerable because of their low adaptive capacity and high dependence on local climate (e.g., rain for agriculture).35
- A 2019 analysis found that not investing in climate change mitigation would result in an average 7.2% decrease in global GDP by 2100 while adhering to the Paris Agreement could limit this decrease to 1.1%.37

Conclusions

- In 2015, the UN established seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including eliminating poverty and hunger, reducing inequalities, and improving health and education while ensuring environmental sustainability.28
- Through 2019, Denmark, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom continued to exceed giving 0.7% of their GNI as Official Development Assistance (ODA), an Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) program. The U.S. donates a lower percentage of GNI, but the greatest absolute dollar amount of any nation. In 2019, U.S. ODA totaled $34.6 billion.30
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Carbon Footprint

“A carbon footprint is the total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions caused directly and indirectly by an individual, organization, event or product.” It is calculated by summing the emissions resulting from every stage of a product or service’s lifetime (material production, manufacturing, use, and end-of-life). Throughout a product’s lifetime, or lifecycle, different GHGs may be emitted, such as carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), and nitrous oxide (N₂O), each with a greater or lesser ability to trap heat in the atmosphere. These differences are accounted for by calculating the global warming potential (GWP) of each gas in units of carbon dioxide equivalents (CO₂e), giving carbon footprints a single unit for easy comparison. See the Center for Sustainable Systems “Greenhouse Gases Factsheet” for more information on GWP. A typical U.S. household has a carbon footprint of 48 metric tons CO₂e/yr.²

Sources of Emissions

Food

- Food accounts for 10-30% of a household’s carbon footprint, typically a higher portion in lower-income households.³ Production accounts for 68% of food emissions, while transportation accounts for 5%.⁴
- Food production emissions consist mainly of CO₂, N₂O, and CH₄, which result primarily from agricultural practices.⁵
- Meat products have larger carbon footprints per calorie than grain or vegetable products because of the inefficient transformation of plant energy to animal energy, and due to the methane released from manure management and enteric fermentation in ruminants.⁹
- Ruminants such as cattle, sheep, and goats produced 178 million metric tons (mmt) CO₂e of enteric methane in the U.S. in 2018.⁶
- Eliminating the transport of food for one year could save the GHG equivalent of driving 1,000 miles, while shifting to a vegetarian meal one day a week could save the equivalent of driving 1,160 miles.⁵
- A vegetarian diet greatly reduces an individual’s carbon footprint, but switching to less carbon intensive meats can have a major impact as well. For example, beef’s GHG emissions per kilogram are 7.2 times greater than those of chicken.⁷

Household Emissions

- For each kilowatt hour generated in the U.S., an average of 0.953 pounds of CO₂e is released at the power plant.⁸ Coal releases 2.2 pounds, petroleum releases 1.9 pounds, and natural gas releases 0.9 pounds. Nuclear, solar, wind, and hydroelectric release no CO₂ when they produce electricity, but emissions are released during upstream production activities (e.g., solar cells, nuclear fuels, cement production).⁴⁹
- Residential electricity use in 2018 emitted 666.5 mmt CO₂e, 10% of the U.S. total.⁵
- Residential space heating and cooling are estimated to account for 44% of energy in U.S. homes in 2020.¹⁰
- Refrigerators are one of the largest users of household appliance energy; in 2015, an average of 720.5 lbs CO₂e per household was due to refrigeration.¹¹
- 26 mmt CO₂e are released in the U.S. each year from washing clothes. Switching to a cold water wash once per week, a household can reduce its GHG emissions by over 70 lbs annually.¹²

Personal Transportation

- U.S. fuel economy (mpg) declined by 12% from 1987-2004, then improved by 30% from 2004-2018, reaching an average of 25.1 mpg in 2018.¹⁴ Annual per capita miles driven increased 9% since 1995 to 9,919 miles in 2018.¹⁵
- Cars and light trucks emitted 1.1 billion metric tons CO₂e or 17% of the total U.S. GHG emissions in 2018.⁶
- Of the roughly 66,000 lbs CO₂e emitted over the lifetime of an internal combustion engine car (assuming 93,000 miles driven), 84% come from the use phase.¹⁶
- Gasoline releases 19.6 pounds of CO₂ per gallon when burned, compared to 22.4 pounds per gallon for diesel.¹⁷ However, diesel has 11% more BTU per gallon, which improves its fuel economy.¹⁸
- The average passenger car emits 0.78 pounds of CO₂ per mile driven.¹⁹
Ways to Reduce Carbon Footprint

- Reduce meat in your diet and avoid wasting food.
- Walk, bike, carpool, use mass transit, or drive a best-in-class vehicle.
- Make sure your car’s tires are properly inflated. Fuel efficiency decreases by 0.2% for each 1 PSI decrease.22
- Smaller homes use less energy. Average household energy use is highest in houses (82.3 million BTU), followed by mobile homes (59.8 million BTU), apartments with 2-4 units (53.5 million BTU), and apartments with 5+ units in the building (14.2 million BTU).31
- Whether you hand wash dishes or use a dishwasher, follow recommended practices to decrease water and energy use and reduce emissions.29
- Energy consumed by devices in standby mode accounts for 5-10% of residential energy use, adding up to $100 per year for the average American household. Unplug electronic devices when not in use or plug them into a power strip and turn the power strip off.25
- Choose energy-efficient lighting and transition away from incandescent light bulbs.24
- Reduce what you send to a landfill by recycling, composting, and buying products with minimal packaging.
- Purchase items with a comparatively low carbon footprint when possible. Some manufacturers have begun assessing and publishing their products’ carbon footprints.
- Covering 80% of roof area on commercial buildings in the U.S. with solar reflective material would offset 125 mmt CO₂ lifetime, equivalent to turning off 32 coal power plants for one year.23
- Replacing the global fleet of shipping containers’ roof and wall panels with aluminum would save $28 billion in fuel.13

Carbon Footprint Calculator

Use one of these tools to estimate your personal or household greenhouse gas emissions and explore the impact of different techniques to lower those emissions:

- The Nature Conservancy: www.nature.org/greenliving/carboncalculator/
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: www3.epa.gov/carbon-footprint-calculator/

References:


Environmental Justice

Environmental Justice (EJ) is defined as the equal treatment and involvement of all people in environmental decision making. Inspired by the Civil Rights movement, EJ became widespread in the 1980s at the intersection of environmentalism and social justice. Environmental injustice is experienced through heightened exposure to pollution and corresponding health risks, limited access to adequate environmental services, and loss of land and resource rights. EJ and sustainability are interdependent and both necessary to create an equitable environment for all.

Built Environment
- The changing demographics of urban areas, loose permitting requirements, and exclusionary zoning laws have funneled racial and ethnic minorities into areas with a greater degree of environmental degradation and reduced support.
- When urban areas were developing across the country, zones reserved exclusively for residential purposes were often expensive. Meanwhile, mixed-use zones were more affordable but allowed residential and industrial buildings to be built side by side. This led to a higher population density in areas closer to environmental hazards.
- Residents of environmentally degraded areas do not or cannot move because of a lack of financial resources, ownership of current land, and sense of place.
- The Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) was created in 1986 under the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act to support emergency planning and publicize information about toxic releases.
- On average, people of color comprise 56% of the population living in neighborhoods with TRI facilities, compared to 30% elsewhere.
- Negative environmental factors can compound social and economic conditions and lead to higher levels of chronic health problems such as asthma, diabetes, and hypertension for minorities and low-income communities. Due to long-standing inequalities in living, working, health, and social conditions, minorities in the U.S. are 4-5 times more likely to be hospitalized from COVID-19 than non-Hispanic white persons.
- Availability of cheap land in disadvantaged urban centers has led to gentrification, an increase in property values that often makes the area unaffordable to existing (generally lower-income) residents. This leads to displacement as well as social, economic, and cultural stress.
- Green spaces improve the physical, social, and economic well-being of a community by providing places to exercise, socialize, and organize, while supporting stable community development.
- Due to uneven distribution patterns, minority and low income communities have far less access to green spaces than white, affluent communities and have limited resources to maintain the green spaces they do have.

Food
- In 2018, 11.1% of U.S. households experienced food insecurity at some point during the year — reducing their access to adequate food for an active, healthy lifestyle.
- In 2018, rates of food insecurity for Black and Hispanic households were higher than the national average and higher in rural versus urban areas.
- Food prices are higher and quality is lower in high poverty areas. In 2018, the average U.S. household spent 14% of income on food; low-income families spent over 30%.
- Hispanic and Black children have higher obesity rates than White children.
- In 2015, about 54.4 million people (17.7% of total U.S. population) had low access to a supermarket due to limited transportation and uneven distribution of supermarkets.
- A case study in Detroit found that households in poor Black communities were on average 1.1 miles farther from a supermarket than in the poorest White neighborhoods.

Energy
- The presence of power plants and mining operations for fuel resources places a significant environmental burden on neighboring communities. Minority and low-income communities are directly and disproportionally affected by polluting facilities and are rarely included in discussions and decision-making processes regarding such facilities.
- The average income of residents living within three miles of a coal power plant in 2000 was over $3,000 less than the national average.

Hydropower and Dams
- Dams threaten vulnerable populations through loss of land and water access, jobs and homes, food insecurity, and increased morbidity.
- Dam construction often displaces low income communities because of financial pressure from wealthier groups or private investors.
- Environmental concerns associated with hydropower include fish mortality, water quality impairment, alteration of natural landscapes and destruction of sacred Indigenous sites.

Energy Poverty
- Nearly 37 million American homes suffer from energy poverty, the inability to meet a household’s energy needs. This makes them vulnerable to detrimental health effects during periods of intense heat or cold.
- Energy poverty results from income inequality and inequalities in energy prices, housing, and energy efficiency.
Materials

Mining

- Roughly 3% of the country’s oil and natural gas reserves, 15% of coal reserves and between 37–55% of uranium reserves are located on Indigenous land. These resources and their associated land have in the past been taken away from Indigenous people once they were discovered.3
- The U.S. imports more than 90% of the elements critical to advanced energy generation, transmission and storage.5
- Artisanal and small scale mining (ASM) accounts for 15-20% of global mineral and metal production. ASM often has unsafe working conditions (e.g., child labor) and bad environmental practices (e.g., high mercury emissions).6

Electronic Waste

- In 2019, 53.6 million metric tons (MMT) of e-waste were generated, with Asia being the largest contributor.7
- Improper recycling and recovery procedures can lead to exposure to carcinogenic and toxic materials, which often occur in developing nations where recycling regulations to limit worker exposure are lax or nonexistent.8
- A review conducted by researchers found increased DNA damage in those living in e-waste recycling towns, along with increases in still and premature births.9
- An estimated 6-29% of the 40 million computers retired in the U.S. were exported in 2010.10 The International Trade Commission found that the U.S. exported 7% of its used electronics by value in 2011.11

Solutions

- In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed an executive order for all government organizations to create strategic plans to address EJ and outline the consequences for failing to consider possible environmental injustices.14
- Launched in 2015, EJSCREEN makes data on environmental and demographic characteristics in the U.S. accessible to the public. It assists federal agencies in complying with the 1994 EJ Executive Order by displaying existing environmental injustice impacts on areas open to development.16
- The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA or Superfund) was passed in 1980 to control hazardous sites. As of June 2020, 44.4 sites from the Superfund National Priorities list have been remediated, over 1500 sites remain on the list.18
- As of 2020, the EPA’s EJ program has granted over $28 million to community projects and organizations in over 1,400 communities focusing on clean air, healthy water, land revitalization, and environmental health.19
- Use the Environmental Justice Atlas website to learn about and spread awareness on an expanse of EJ issues.20
- Engage in and support bottom-up models of research that are responsive to the environmental concerns of communities rather than the interests of large, corporate funders. Advocate for the inclusion of local knowledge in research in addition to observations obtained from scientific methods.21

Climate

- The World Health Organization estimates that climate change will cause an additional 250,000 deaths per year between 2030 and 2050.22
- Though wealthy, developed nations like the U.S. emit larger amounts of GHG per capita, developing nations experience the worst effects of climate change relative to wealthier countries due to their limited resources and ability to adapt.23
- Low-income communities are more likely to be exposed to climate change threats (e.g., flooding, storms, and droughts) due to inadequate housing and infrastructure.24
- People living closer to the coast and small island nations are more vulnerable to severe storms, sea level rise, and storm surges as a result of climate change.25
- Indigenous populations that rely on subsistence farming practices for food have limited options for adapting to climate change threats.26
- Areas with poor healthcare infrastructure - often in developing nations - will be the least able to cope with catastrophic effects of climate change such as heat waves, droughts, severe storms, and outbreaks of waterborne diseases.27

Energy plays a vital role in modern society, enabling systems that meet human needs such as sustenance, shelter, employment, and transportation. In 2018, the U.S. spent $1.3 trillion on energy, or 6.2% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). When spread over the population, annual costs were $3,891 per person. Environmental impacts associated with the production and consumption of energy include global climate change, acid rain, hazardous air pollution, smog, radioactive waste, and habitat destruction. The nation’s heavy reliance on fossil fuels (primarily imported crude oil) poses major concerns for energy security. Potential gains in energy efficiency in all sectors may be offset by increases in consumption, a phenomena called the rebound effect.

Patterns of Use

Demand
- With less than 5% of the world’s population, the U.S. consumes almost 17% of the world’s energy and accounts for 15% of world GDP. In comparison, the European Union has 6% of the world’s population, uses 11% of its energy, and accounts for 16% of its GDP, while China has 18% of the world’s population, consumes 24% of its energy, and accounts for 18% of its GDP.
- Each day, U.S. per capita energy consumption includes 2.6 gallons of oil, 9.7 pounds of coal, and 235 cubic feet of natural gas.
- Residential daily consumption of electricity is 11.8 kilowatt-hours (kWh) per person.
- In 2019, total U.S. energy consumption decreased 0.9% from 2018 peak levels.

Supply
- By current estimates, 79% of U.S. energy will come from fossil fuels in 2050.
- Renewable energy consumption is projected to increase annually at an average rate of 1.9% between 2019 and 2050, compared to 0.3% growth in total energy use. Residential photovoltaics are projected to grow annually by nearly 6%. At these rates, renewables would only provide 16% of U.S. energy consumption in 2050, which is slightly more than today’s 11.4% renewable energy consumption.
- U.S. net imports met 3% of domestic oil demand in 2019. This figure is projected to be slightly negative (net exporter) by 2050. Canada, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia are the three largest foreign suppliers of U.S. oil.
- The Persian Gulf region accounted for 11% of U.S. petroleum imports in 2019 and contains 50% of the world’s oil reserves. Roughly 16% of all reserves lie in Saudi Arabia alone. OPEC controlled 18% of the oil imported by the U.S. in 2019.

Life Cycle Impacts
- Air emissions from the combustion of fossil fuels are the primary environmental concern of the U.S. energy system. Such emissions include carbon dioxide (CO₂), nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, volatile organic compounds, particulate matter, and mercury.
- Methane leakage from the oil and natural gas supply chain (fracking wells, pipelines, etc.) is also of concern as it is estimated to be 13 million metric tons (MMT) per year, equivalent to 2.1% of U.S. annual gross natural gas production. With a global warming potential of 28, this methane leakage is equivalent to 364 MMT of CO₂, or 5.5% of total U.S. CO₂ emissions in 2018.
- U.S. greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in 2018 were 3.7% greater than 1990 values. 75% of total U.S. GHG emissions came from burning fossil fuels in 2018.
- Other energy sources also have environmental implications. For example, issues associated with nuclear power generation include radioactive waste and a high energy requirement to build the plants and mine the uranium; large hydroelectric power plants cause habitat degradation and fish kills; and wind turbines alter landscapes in ways some find unappealing and can increase bird and bat mortality.
Solutions and Sustainable Alternatives

Consume Less

- Reducing energy consumption not only brings environmental benefits, but also can result in cost savings for individuals, businesses, and government agencies.
- Living in smaller dwellings, living closer to work, and utilizing public transportation are examples of ways to reduce energy usage. See the CSS factsheets on personal transportation and residential buildings for additional ways to trim energy consumption.

Increase Efficiency

- An aggressive commitment to energy efficiency could reduce U.S. carbon emissions by 57% (2,500 MMT) by 2050.
- Additional information on energy efficiency can be found at the following organizations’ websites:

Increase Renewables

- Installed wind capacity in the U.S. grew 10.5% in 2019, expanding to over 107 GW. If 22.4 GW of wind capacity were installed by 2030, an amount determined feasible by one U.S. DOE study, wind would satisfy 20% of projected electricity demand.
- Solar photovoltaic modules covering 0.6% of the land in the U.S. could supply all of the nation’s electricity.

Encourage Supportive Public Policy

- The U.S. currently produces 15% of the world’s energy-related CO2 emissions. U.S. emissions are projected to decrease by 8% by 2035 from current levels. The Climate Action Now Act, passed by the House in May 2019, would require an annual plan to ensure the United States meets its stated goals under the Paris Agreement of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 26-28% by 2025. The Act has not yet been brought to a vote in the Senate. In comparison, the United Kingdom established a goal of having net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.
- In 2012, new auto manufacturing standards for model years 2017-2025 were set, raising corporate average fuel economy (CAFE) standards to 54.5 miles per gallon for new light-duty vehicles in 2025. In 2020, the Safer Affordable Fuel-Efficient (SAFE) Vehicle Rule revised the CAFE standards down to an annual fuel efficiency improvement of 1.5% until 2030, equal to an average fleet-wide target of 40.5 mpg. The original CAFE rule was projected to save 4 billion gallons of fuel, between $326 and $451 billion, and cut CO2 emissions by 2,000 MMT. The new SAFE rule will result in 867-923 MMT more CO2 emissions than CAFE.
- The growth of wind and biomass was spurred by the 2.5¢/kWh Federal Production Tax Credit (PTC), as well as state Renewable Portfolio Standards (RPS) that require a certain percentage of electricity be derived from renewable sources. The PTC for wind will expire December 31, 2020. Thirty-seven states, the District of Columbia, and four U.S. territories had renewable portfolio standards or goals in place as of April 2020.
- A $2,500-$7,500 federal tax credit is available for electric and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles purchased after January 1, 2010.
- Homeowners can receive tax credits for up to 26% of purchase and installation costs for renewable energy additions to new and existing houses.

Additional information on energy efficiency can be found at the following organizations’ websites:

<table>
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<th>State RPS</th>
<th>State Goal</th>
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**kWh** = kilowatt hour. One kWh is the amount of energy required to light a 100 watt light bulb for 10 hours.

**Btu** = British Thermal Unit. One Btu is the amount of energy required to raise the temperature of a pound of water by 1° Fahrenheit.

**Quad** = quadrillion (10¹⁵) Btu. One Quad is equivalent to the annual energy consumption of ten million U.S. households.

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U.S. Renewable Energy

Patterns of Use

While energy is essential to modern society, most primary sources are unsustainable. The current fuel mix is associated with a multitude of environmental impacts, including global climate change, acid rain, freshwater consumption, hazardous air pollution, and radioactive waste. Renewable energy has the potential to meet demand with a much smaller environmental footprint and can help to alleviate other pressing problems, such as energy security, by contributing to a distributed and diversified energy infrastructure. About 80% of the nation’s energy comes from fossil fuels, 8.4% from nuclear, and 11.4% from renewable sources. Wind and solar are the fastest growing renewable sources, but contribute just 3.8% of total energy used in the United States.³

Major Renewable Sources

Wind
- U.S. onshore wind resources have the potential to generate almost 11,000 GW of electricity, 106 times more than the current installed capacity of 103.6 GW.³⁴ U.S. offshore wind resources are approximately 4,200 GW. To date, only 30 MW have been deployed, but a pipeline of more than 26 GW is in various stages of development.⁴⁵
- Over the past decade, the federal production tax credit (PTC) has significantly influenced wind development, but cycles of legislative enactment and expiration lead to year-to-year changes in investment of up to 92%.⁶ In 2019, the PTC was extended with a new expiration date of December 31, 2020.⁷ Over 9 GW of wind capacity was installed in the U.S. in 2019, a 20% increase from 2018.⁸
- Based on the average U.S. electricity fuel mix, a 2.32 MW wind turbine (U.S. average in 2017) can displace 4,600 metric tons of CO₂ emissions per year.⁹ By 2050, 404 GW of wind capacity would meet an estimated 35% of U.S. electricity demand and result in 12.3 gigatonnes of avoided CO₂ emissions, a 14% reduction when compared to 2013.¹⁰

Solar
- Assuming intermediate efficiency, solar photovoltaic (PV) modules covering 0.6% of U.S. land area could meet national electricity demand.¹³
- PV module prices have declined to $0.58-$0.75/Watt in residential systems.¹⁴ U.S. market share of PV cell and module manufacturing has dropped to just 1% of worldwide production.¹⁵
- Solar PV installations reached a high of 14,762 MWdc in 2016.¹⁶ In 2019, over 13 GWdc of solar photovoltaic capacity was added in the U.S., raising total installed capacity to over 81 GW.¹² Solar accounted for 40% of new generating capacity in 2019.¹⁸
- The U.S. Department of Energy’s SunShot Initiative aims to reduce the price of solar energy 50% by 2030, which is projected to lead to 33% of U.S. electricity demand met by solar and a 18% decrease in electricity sector greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.¹³
- While solar PV modules produce no emissions during operation, toxic substances (e.g., cadmium and selenium) are used in some technologies.¹³

Biomass
- Wood—mostly as pulp, paper, and paperboard industry waste products—accounts for 46% of total biomass energy consumption. Waste—municipal solid waste, landfill gas, sludge, tires, and agricultural by-products—accounts for an additional 9%.¹
- Biomass has low net CO₂ emissions compared to fossil fuels. At combustion, it releases CO₂,
previously removed from the atmosphere. Additional emissions are associated with processing and 12.4 acres of land are required to generate one GWh of electricity per year.  

- U.S. ethanol production is projected to reach 46 million gallons per day in 2050.

### Geothermal

- Hydrothermal resources, i.e., steam and hot water, are available primarily in the western U.S., Alaska, and Hawaii, yet geothermal heat pumps can be used almost anywhere to extract heat from shallow ground, which stays at relatively constant temperatures year-round.

- Each year, electricity from hydrothermal sources offsets the emission of 4.1 million tons of CO2, 80 thousand tons of nitrogen oxides, and 110 thousand tons of particulate matter from coal-powered plants. Some geothermal facilities produce solid waste such as salts and minerals that must be disposed of in approved sites, but some by-products can be recovered and recycled.

- Electricity generated from geothermal power plants is projected to increase from 16.4 billion kWh in 2019 to 52.2 billion kWh in 2050 and has the potential to exceed 50 GW, which is half of the current U.S. capacity.

### Hydroelectric

- In the U.S., net electricity generation from conventional hydropower peaked in 1997 at 356 TWh/yr. Currently, the U.S. gets about 274 TWh/yr of electricity from hydropower.

- While electricity generated from hydropower is virtually emission free, significant levels of methane and CO2 may be emitted through the decomposition of vegetation in the reservoir. Other environmental concerns include fish injury and mortality, habitat degradation, and water quality impairment. “Fish-friendly” turbines and smaller dams help mitigate some of these problems.

### Advancing Renewable Energy

#### Encourage Supportive Public Policy

- Renewable Portfolio Standards (RPS) that mandate certain levels of renewable generation and Clean Energy Standards (CES) that mandate certain levels of carbon-free generation are proving successful. Thirty-seven states, the District of Columbia, and four U.S. territories had renewable portfolio standards or goals in place as of August 2020. State standards are projected to support an additional 73 GW of renewable electricity projects by 2030.

- Renewable energy growth is also driven by important federal incentives such as the Investment Tax Credit, which offsets upfront costs by 10-26%, as well as state incentives such as tax credits, grants, and rebates. Eliminating subsidies for fossil and nuclear energy would encourage renewable energy. Congress allocated over $12.3 billion in tax relief to the oil and gas industries for fiscal years 2016-2020. Studies estimate that the Price-Anderson Act, which limits the liability of U.S. nuclear power plants in the case of an accident, amounts to a subsidy of $366 million to $3.5 billion annually.

- Net metering enables customers to sell excess electricity to the grid, eliminates the need for on-site storage, and provides an incentive for installing renewable energy devices. Forty states, the District of Columbia, and four U.S. territories have some form of net metering program.

#### Engage the Industrial, Residential, and Commercial Sectors

- Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs) are sold by renewable energy producers in addition to the electricity they produce; for a few cents per kWh. Renewable Portfolio Standards or goals in place as of August 2020.

- Many companies purchase renewable energy as part of their environmental programs. Google, Microsoft, Intel, Walmart, and Equinix were the top five users of renewable energy as of August 2020.

#### Calculations and References

- **kWh** = kilowatt hour. One kWh is the amount of energy required to light a 100 watt light bulb for 10 hours.

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7. DSIRE (2020) "Renewable Energy Production Tax Credit (PTC).”
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Wind Energy

Wind Resource and Potential
Approximately 2% of the solar energy striking the Earth’s surface is converted into kinetic energy in wind. Wind turbines convert the wind’s kinetic energy to electricity without emissions. The distribution of wind energy is heterogeneous, both across the surface of the Earth and vertically through the atmosphere. Average annual wind speeds of 6.5 m/s or greater at 80 m are generally considered commercially viable. New technologies, however, are expanding the wind resources available for commercial projects. Less than 3% of U.S. electricity was derived from wind energy in 2019, but wind capacity is increasing rapidly.

- High wind speeds yield more power because wind power is proportional to the cube of wind speed.
- Wind speeds are slower close to the Earth’s surface and faster at higher altitudes. The average hub height of modern wind turbines is 88 meters.
- Global onshore and offshore wind power potential at commercial turbine hub heights could provide 840,000 TWh of electricity annually. Total global electricity consumption from all sources in 2017 was about 22,417 TWh. Similarly, the annual continental U.S. wind potential of 68,000 TWh greatly exceeds annual U.S. electricity consumption of 3,896 TWh.
- A 2015 study by the U.S. Department of Energy found wind could provide 20% of U.S. electricity by 2030 and 35% by 2050.

Wind Technology and Impact
Horizontal Axis Wind Turbines
- Horizontal axis wind turbines (HAWT) are the predominant turbine design in use today. The HAWT rotor comprises blades (usually three) symmetrically mounted to a hub. The rotor is connected via a shaft to a gearbox and generator. The nacelle houses these components atop a tower that sits on a concrete foundation.
- HAWT come in a variety of sizes, ranging from 2.5 meters in diameter and 1 kW for residential applications to 100+ meters in diameter and 10+ MW for offshore applications.
- The theoretical maximum efficiency of a turbine is ~59%, also known as the Betz Limit. Most turbines extract ~50% of the energy from the wind that passes through the rotor area.
- The capacity factor of a wind turbine is its average power output divided by its maximum power capability. On land, capacity factors range from 0.26 to 0.52. The average 2018 capacity factor for projects built between 2014 and 2017 was 41.9%. In the U.S., the fleetwide average capacity factor was 35%.
- Offshore winds are generally stronger than on land, and capacity factors are higher on average (expected to reach 51% by 2022 for new projects), but offshore wind farms are more expensive to build and maintain. Offshore turbines are currently placed in depths up to 40-50m (about 131-164ft), but floating offshore wind technologies could greatly expand generation potential as 58% of the total technical wind resource in the U.S. lies in depths greater than 60m.

Installation, Manufacturing, and Cost
- More than 59,900 utility-scale wind turbines are installed in the U.S., with a cumulative capacity of 110,476 MW. U.S. wind capacity increased by 166% between 2010 and 2020, a 10% average annual increase. Global wind capacity increased by 15% annually, on average, from 2009 to 2019, reaching 671 GW in 2019.
- U.S. average turbine size was 2.43 MW in 2018, up 5% from 2.32 MW in 2017.
- Average capacity factor has increased from less than 25% for projects installed from 1998 to 2001 to around 42% for projects built between 2014 and 2017.
- On a capacity-weighted average basis, wind project costs declined by roughly $3,330/kW between the early 1980’s and 2018. In 2018, costs were $1,470/kW.
- The average installed cost of a small (<100 kW) turbine was approximately $10,850 per kW in 2017.
- In 2017-18, new wind energy purchase contracts averaged 1.3-1.8¢/kWh, while the average residential electricity price was 13.0¢/kWh in 2019.
- Texas (29,407 MW), Iowa (10,664 MW), and Oklahoma (8,173 MW) are the leading states in total installed wind capacity.
• There are 120,000 full-time workers in the U.S. wind industry and in 2018, turbines and components were manufactured at 530 facilities in 43 states.7
• Large (>20 MW) wind projects require ~8 acres of land area per MW of installed capacity, but 1% or less of this total area is occupied by roads, turbine foundations, or other equipment; the remainder is available for other uses.3
• For farmers, annual lease payments provide a stable income of around $3,000/MW of turbine capacity, depending on the number of turbines on the property, the value of the energy generated, and lease terms.9 A 250-acre farm with income from wind at about $55 an acre could have an annual income from a wind lease of $14,000.22

Energy Performance and Environmental Impacts

• Wind turbines can reduce the impacts associated with conventional electricity generation. The 2019 U.S. wind capacity avoided an estimated 189 million metric tons of CO2 emissions and reduced water use by about 103 billion gallons compared to conventional power plants.7,23
• According to a 2015 study, if 35% of U.S. electricity was wind-generated by 2050, electric sector GHG emissions would be reduced by 23%, eliminating 510 billion kg of CO2 emissions annually, or 12.3 trillion kg cumulatively from 2013, and decreasing water use by 15%.9
• A 2013 study found energy return on investment (EROI) (energy delivered/energy invested) for wind power of between 18:2014:26
• Annual avian mortality from collisions with turbines is 0.2 million, compared with 150 million mortalities due to power lines and 300-1,000 million from buildings. The best way to minimize mortality is careful siting.9 Bat mortality due to wind turbines is less well studied. Research shows that a large percentage of bat collisions occur in migratory species during summer and fall months when they are most active.2,4 The wind industry has been testing methods that potentially reduce bat mortality by more than 50%.9
• Noise 35dB from a typical wind farm is 35-45 dB. For comparison, a quiet bedroom is 35 dB and a 40 mph car 100m away is 55 dB.26
• As of 2013, several studies have conclusively determined that sound generated by wind turbines has no impact on human health.9

Solutions and Sustainable Actions

Policies Promoting Renewables

Policies that support wind and other renewables can address externalities associated with conventional electricity, such as health effects from pollution, environmental damage from resource extraction, and long-term nuclear waste storage.
• Renewable Portfolio Standards (RPS) require electricity providers to obtain a minimum fraction of energy from renewable resources.27
• Feed-in tariffs set a minimum price per kWh paid to renewable electricity generators by retail electricity distributors.27
• Net metering - offered in 39 states, D.C., and four U.S. territories - allows customers to sell excess electricity back to the grid.28
• Capacity rebates are one-time, up-front payments for building renewable energy projects, based on the capacity (in watts) installed.
• The federal production tax credit (PTC) provides a 1-2¢/kWh benefit for the first ten years of a wind energy facility’s operation for projects started by December 31, 2020.29 Small (<100 kW) installations can receive tax credits for between 22-26% of the capital and installation cost based on the construction start date.20
• Qualified Energy Conservation Bonds (QECBs) are interest-free financing options for state and local government renewables projects.30
• Section 9006 of the Farm Bill is the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) that funds grants and loan guarantees for agricultural producers and rural small businesses to purchase and install renewable energy systems.31
• System benefits charges are paid by all utility customers to create a fund for low-income support, renewables, efficiency, and R&D projects that are unlikely to be provided by a competitive market.23

What You Can Do

• Make your lifestyle more efficient to reduce the amount of energy you use.
• Invest in non-fossil electricity generation infrastructure by purchasing “green power” from your utility.
• Buy Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs). RECs are sold by renewable energy producers for a few cents per kilowatt hour, customers can purchase RECs to “offset” their electricity usage and help renewable energy become more competitive.47
• Consider installing your own wind system, especially if you live in a state that provides financial incentives or has net metering.

29. U.S. DOE, EERE (2020) Production Tax Credit and Investment Tax Credit For Wind.
32. DSIRE (2016) “USDA - Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) Grants.”
33. DSIRE (2016) “Glossary.”
Solar energy can be harnessed in two basic ways. First, solar thermal technologies utilize sunlight to heat water for domestic uses, warm building spaces, or heat fluids to drive electricity-generating turbines. Second, photovoltaics (PVs) are semiconductors that generate electrical current from sunlight. Only 1.8% of U.S. electricity was generated with solar technologies in 2019.\(^1\)

### Solar Resource and Potential

- On average, 1.73 x 10\(^5\) terawatts (TW) of solar radiation continuously strike the Earth, while global electricity demand averages 2.6 TW.\(^{3,4}\)
- Electricity demand peaks around mid-day, leading to energy surplus and deficits. Energy storage and demand forecasting will help to match PV generation with demand.\(^5\)
- If co-located with load centers, solar PV can be used to reduce stress on electricity distribution networks, especially during peak demand.\(^6\)
- PV conversion efficiency is the percentage of incident solar energy that is converted to electricity.\(^7\)
- Though most commercial panels have efficiencies from 15% to 20%, some researchers have developed PV cells with efficiencies approaching 50%.\(^8,9\)
- Assuming intermediate efficiency, PVs covering 0.6% of U.S. land area would generate enough electricity to meet national demand.\(^10\)
- In 2011, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) announced the SunShot Initiative. Its aim was to reduce the cost of solar energy by 75%, making it cost competitive with other energy options. In 2017, DOE announced that the 2020 goal of utility-scale solar for \(0.06/\text{kWh}\) had been achieved three years earlier than expected. The 2030 goal includes reducing utility-scale solar energy to \(0.03/\text{kWh}\), cheaper than electricity from fossil fuel energy resources.\(^11\)

### PV Technology and Impacts

#### PV Cells

- PV cells are made from semiconductor materials that eject electrons when photons strike the surface, producing an electrical current.\(^9\)
- Most PV cells are small, rectangular, and produce a few watts of direct current (DC) electricity.\(^16\)
- PV cells also include electrical contacts that allow electrons to flow to the load and surface coatings that reduce light reflection.\(^15\)
- A variety of semiconductor materials can be used for PVs, including silicon, copper indium gallium diselenide (CIGS), cadmium telluride (CdTe), and even some organic compounds (OPV).\(^15\)
- Although PV conversion efficiency is an important metric, cost efficiency—the cost per watt of power—is more important for most applications.\(^12\)

#### PV Modules and Balance of System (BOS)

- PV modules typically comprise a rectangular grid of 60 to 72 cells, connected in several parallel circuits and laminated between a transparent front surface and a structural back surface. They usually have metal frames and weigh 34 to 62 pounds.\(^7\)
- A PV array is a group of modules, connected electrically and fastened to a rigid structure.\(^18\)
- BOS components include any elements necessary in addition to the actual PV panels, such as wires that connect modules, junction boxes to merge the circuits, mounting hardware, and power electronics that manage the PV array’s output.\(^18\)
- An inverter is a power electronic device that converts electricity generated by PV systems from DC to alternating current (AC).\(^18\)
- A charge controller is a power electronic device used to manage energy storage in batteries, which themselves can be BOS components.\(^18\)
- In contrast to a rack-mounted PV array, Building Integrated PV (BIPV) replaces building materials (e.g., shingles) to improve PV aesthetics and costs.\(^19\)
- Some ground-mount PV arrays employ a solar tracker. This technology can increase energy output by as much as 100%.\(^20\)
PV Installation, Manufacturing, and Cost

- In 2019, global PV power capacity grew by over 115 GW and reached 633.7 GW. Solar PV capacity has grown by nearly 400 times since 2000.\(^2\)
- Top installers in 2019 were China (30.1 GW), the U.S. (13.3 GW), and India (8.9 GW).\(^3\)
- New PV installations grew by 13% in 2019 and accounted for 48% of global power plant capacity additions. Even with this growth, solar power only accounts for 2.6% of global power generation.\(^4\)
- The cost of solar power has dropped nearly 89% since 2009. Various contracts have been signed around the world with solar power prices as low as 1-2¢/kWh; this is much cheaper than conventional power sources.\(^5\) In comparison, U.S. retail electricity averaged 10.60¢/kWh for all sectors and 13.04¢/kWh for residential consumers in 2019.\(^6\)
- In 2019, global investment in solar power dropped to $131.1 billion. This is partially a result of declining capital costs of PV systems.\(^7\)
- PV system/component manufacturing employed 34,000 people in the U.S. in 2018.\(^8\)

Energy Performance and Environmental Impacts

- Net energy ratio compares the life cycle energy output of a PV system to its life cycle primary energy input. One study showed that amorphous silicon PVs generate 3 to 6 times more energy than are required to produce them.\(^9\)
- Recycling multi-crystalline cells can reduce manufacturing energy by over 50%.\(^10\)
- Although pollutants and toxic substances are emitted during PV manufacturing, life cycle emissions are low. For example, the life cycle emissions of thin-film CdTe are roughly 14 g CO\(_2\)e per kWh delivered, far below electricity sources such as coal (1,001 g CO\(_2\)e/kWh).\(^11,12\)
- PVs can have lower environmental impacts than fossil fuel electricity generation; for example, thermoelectric plants use an average of 15 gallons of water per kWh generated.\(^13\)

Solutions, Sustainable Actions, and Future Technology

Policies Promoting Renewables

- The price consumers pay for electricity does not cover externalities such as the cost of health effects from air pollution, environmental damage from resource extraction, or long-term nuclear waste storage.\(^21\) Property assessed clean energy (PACE) programs allow property owners to finance the upfront costs of a solar installation through a voluntary assessment on annual property taxes.\(^22\) Green banks and other lending institutions are being developed to specifically fund and support clean energy projects on local, regional, and national scales.\(^23\)
- Carbon cap-and-trade policies would work in favor of PVs by increasing the cost of fossil fuel energy generation.\(^24\)
- PV policy incentives include renewable portfolio standards (RPS), feed-in tariffs (FIT), capacity rebates, and net metering.\(^25\)
- An RPS requires electricity providers to obtain a minimum fraction of their energy from renewable resources by a certain date.
- A FIT sets a minimum per kWh price that retail electricity providers must pay renewable electricity generators.
- Capacity rebates are one-time, up-front payments for building renewable energy projects, based on installed capacity (in watts).
- With net metering, PV owners get credit from the utility (up to their annual energy use) for energy returned to the grid.

What You Can Do

- “Green pricing” allows customers to pay a premium for electricity that supports investment in renewable technologies. Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs) can be purchased to “offset” commodity electricity usage and help renewable energy become more competitive.\(^26,27\)

Future Technology

- Two emerging PV technologies are bifacial PV modules and concentrator PV (CPV) technology. Bifacial modules are able to collect light on both sides of the PV cells, which can improve electricity generation depending on environmental conditions. CPV utilizes low-cost optics to concentrate light onto a small solar cell. By reducing the area of PV cell needed, more resources can be focused on high efficiency cells.\(^28,29\)

8. Energy SAGE (2020) "What are the most efficient solar panels on the market? Solar panel efficiency explained."
13. Adapted from NASA Science (2002) "How Do Photovoltaics Work?"
34. Clean Energy Credit Union (2020) "Our Story."
37. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2019) "Green Power Supply Options."
Biofuels

Biofuels have the potential to reduce the energy and greenhouse gas emission intensities associated with transportation, but can have other significant effects on society and the environment. Depending on demand, crop growing conditions, and technology, they may require significant increases in cropland and irrigation water use. Also, biofuels may have already affected world food prices.

Patterns of Use

Production

- In the U.S., ethanol is primarily derived by processing and fermenting the starch in corn kernels into a high-purity alcohol. 94% of U.S. ethanol is derived from corn, while Brazil uses sugar cane as the primary feedstock.¹ ²
- The U.S. and Brazil produced about 84% of the world’s ethanol in 2019.³
- In the 2018/19 season, 5.4 billion bushels of corn, 38% of the U.S. supply, became ethanol feedstock.⁴
- Cellulosic ethanol feedstocks are abundant and include corn stalks, plant residue, waste wood chips, and switchgrass. Making ethanol from these sources is more difficult because cellulose does not break down into sugars as easily.⁵
- Biodiesel can be made from animal fats, grease, vegetable oils, and algae. In the U.S., soybean oil, corn oil, and recycled cooking oils are common feedstocks.⁶
- Biodiesel from algae is an area of ongoing research. Algae could potentially produce 10 to 100 times more fuel per acre than other crops.⁷

Consumption and Demand

- In 2019, the average U.S. petroleum consumption was 20.5 million barrels per day, of which 3% was imported.⁸
- In 2019, there were 200 ethanol refineries and 102 biodiesel production plants in the U.S.⁹ ¹⁰
- U.S. biodiesel production facilities operated at 68% capacity in 2019.¹¹ ¹²
- Many biodiesel producers are reliant on federal tax credits and remain sensitive to volatile feedstock (soybean oil) and energy (petroleum) prices. The biodiesel tax incentive was recently retroactively reinstated from January 1, 2018 and will remain in place until the end of 2022.¹³
- In 2019, 10% of U.S. vehicle fuel consumption (by volume) was ethanol and over 98% of U.S. gasoline contains ethanol.¹⁴ ¹⁵
- E85 sells for less than regular gasoline, but contains less energy per gallon. Flex-fuel vehicles using E85 see a 15-27% reduction in fuel economy.¹⁶

Life Cycle Impacts

Energy

- The Fossil Energy Ratio (FER) is the ratio of energy output to nonrenewable energy inputs.⁷ Gasoline has a value of 0.8 (1.2 BTU of fossil fuel needed to supply 1 BTU of gas at the pump).¹⁷ Recent estimates have produced a FER of about 1.5 for ethanol, though areas with highly efficient corn agriculture, such as Iowa and Minnesota, have FERs close to 4, and scientists believe with increased efficiency in biomass handling, the energy balance could eventually rise to 60.¹⁸
- From 1990-2006, the FER for soybean biodiesel improved from around 3.2 to 5.5.¹⁹ During the same period, ethanol transitioned from an energy sink to a net energy gain. Much of the improvement came from the reduction of fertilizer inputs to grow corn.²⁰
- In comparison, petroleum-based diesel has a FER of 0.83.²¹

Greenhouse Gases (GHGs)

- On average, GHG emissions from corn ethanol are 34% lower than gasoline when including Land Use Change (LUC) emissions and 44% lower when excluding them.²²
GHG emissions for cellulosic ethanol average around 97% lower than gasoline when including LUC emissions and 95% lower when excluding LUC emissions.29
The use of B20 (20% biodiesel, 80% petroleum diesel), a common biodiesel blend in the U.S., can reduce CO₂ emissions by 15% compared to petroleum diesel. The use of B100 (100% biodiesel) can reduce CO₂ emissions by 74%.24,35
Biodiesel CO₂ emissions are assumed to be taken up again by growth of new feedstock, thus, tailpipe CO₂ emissions from biofuels are excluded from emissions calculations.26,47
Studies have suggested that increased biofuel production in the U.S. will increase global GHG emissions, due to higher crop prices motivating farmers in other countries to convert non-cropland to cropland. Clearing new cropland releases carbon stored in vegetation, preventing the future storage of carbon in those plants.28

**Other Impacts**
A large hypoxic zone (with a five-year average area of 6,000 square miles) occurs in the Gulf of Mexico each summer.29 Excess nitrogen, primarily from fertilizer runoff from Midwest farms, causes algae blooms that decompose and deplete dissolved oxygen, injuring or killing aquatic life. Increasing corn ethanol acreage without changing cultivation techniques will make reducing the hypoxic zone more difficult.30
Globally, average arable land used for biofuels is predicted to rise from 2.5% today to 6% in 2050. However, the impacts of growing biofuel crops vary widely due to regional differences in climate and farmland availability.35
The irrigation of feedstocks requires considerably more water than the manufacturing of biofuels. Although a typical biorefinery consumes 1 to 4 gallons of water per gallon of biofuel, corn grown in 2003 in Nebraska’s dry climate required 780 gallons of irrigation water per gallon of ethanol.32 The majority of corn production for ethanol occurs in highly irrigated areas, with substantial amounts from groundwater.34
A review of studies focused on the food price crisis of 2006-2008 found that the growth of biofuel feedstock contributes between 20-50% to the price increase of maize. Land use change resulting from the increased biofuel demand is expected to increase global maize and wheat prices on the order of 1-2% and vegetable oil prices by around 10%.35

**Solutions and Sustainable Actions**
Under the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS2) requires that 36 billion gallons per year (bg/y) of biofuels be produced by 2022: 16 bg/y from cellulosic sources, 5 bg/y from other advanced sources, and no more than 15 bg/y of corn ethanol. Life cycle GHG standards are also in place to ensure the biofuels produce fewer emissions than their petroleum counterparts.36
U.S. ethanol producers, blenders, and resellers have been supported by a series of tax incentives, some of which were extended in 2020.35
Fuel content standards are one policy option to encourage biofuel use. Regular gasoline sold in Brazil is required to contain 27% ethanol.38 Overall, ethanol makes up 52% of transportation fuel in Brazil, compared to 10% in the U.S.39-41
The U.S. EPA and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration jointly issued the Safer Affordable Fuel-Efficient (SAFE) rule in 2020 establishing new GHG emissions and fuel economy standards. Vehicle manufacturers’ new passenger car and light-duty truck fleets must increase efficiency by 1.5% annually, reaching 201 g CO₂/mi and 40.5 mpg by 2030.41
Public transportation, carpooling, biking, and telecommuting are excellent ways to reduce transportation energy use and related impacts. See the CSS “Personal Transportation Factsheet” for more information.

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40. U.S. EIA (2020) “How much ethanol is in gasoline, and how does it affect fuel economy?”
Nuclear Energy

Nuclear power plants generate electricity by using controlled nuclear fission chain reactions (i.e., splitting atoms) to heat water and produce steam to power turbines. Nuclear is often labeled a “clean” energy source because no greenhouse gases (GHGs) or other air emissions are released from the power plant. As the U.S. and other nations search for low-emission energy sources, the benefits of nuclear power must be weighed against the operational risks and the challenges of storing spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste.

Nuclear Energy Use and Potential

- Nuclear energy provides about 20% of U.S. electricity, and this share has remained stable since around 1990. Nuclear power plants had a capacity factor of 93.5% in 2019.
- The first U.S. nuclear power plant began commercial operations in 1958. During the 1970s, more than 50 nuclear reactors went online. Presently, 29 states have at least one nuclear plant and 35 plants have two or more reactors. Since 1995, U.S. nuclear electricity generation has grown despite no new reactors and 13 shutdowns, due to higher utilization and uprating of existing plants.
- 667 reactors have been built worldwide since the first was built in 1954 in Obninsk, Russia, though currently, there are only 440 in operation, 95 of which are in the U.S. As of April 2020, 55 reactors were under construction, including 4 in the U.S. and 12 in China.
- In 2017, the U.S. generated nearly a third of the world’s nuclear electricity. Countries generating the next largest amounts of electricity using nuclear were France, China, and Russia.
- Pressurized Water Reactors (PWR) and Boiling Water Reactors (BWR) are the most common technologies in use. Two-thirds of U.S. reactors are PWRs.
- Levelized cost of energy (LCOE) includes the lifetime costs of building, operating, maintaining, and fueling a power plant. Estimated LCOE for plants built in the near future are: combined cycle natural gas: 3.81 ¢/kWh; advanced nuclear: 7.49 ¢/kWh; and biomass: 9.48 ¢/kWh.

Nuclear Fuel

- Most nuclear reactors use “enriched” uranium, meaning the fuel has a higher concentration of uranium-235 (U-235) isotopes, which are easier to split to produce energy. When it is mined, uranium ore averages less than 1% U-235.
- Milling and enrichment processes crush the ore, use solvents to extract uranium oxide (UO₂, i.e., yellowcake), and chemically convert it to uranium hexafluoride (UF₆), which is enriched to increase the U-235 concentration in the fuel. Finally, a fuel fabricator converts UF₆ into UO₂ powder that is pressed into pellets with 2%-5% U-235 concentrations.
- Uranium can be enriched by gaseous diffusion or gas centrifuge. Both concentrate the slightly lighter U-235 molecules from a gas containing mostly U-238, the former with membrane filters and the latter by spinning. Other technologies are currently in development, with laser enrichment processes closest to commercial viability.
- In 2019, 79 metric tons (mt) of UO₂ were extracted from 6 mines in the U.S. The highest grade ore in the U.S. average less than 1% uranium, some Canadian ore is more than 15% uranium.
- 1% of uranium available at reasonable cost is found in the U.S. The largest deposits are in Australia (31%), Kazakhstan (14%), China (8%), and Russia (8%). U.S. nuclear plants purchased 21,909 mt of uranium in 2019. Fuel was imported mostly from Canada (21%), Kazakhstan (18%), Australia (18%), and Russia (15%).
- Globally, nuclear power reactors required 68,240 mt of uranium in 2020.

Energy and Environmental Impacts

The nuclear fuel cycle is the entire process of producing, using, and disposing of uranium fuel. Powering a one-gigawatt nuclear plant for a year can require mining 20,000-400,000 mt of ore, processing it into 27.6 mt of uranium fuel, and disposing of 27.6 mt of highly radioactive spent fuel, of which 90% (by volume) is low-level waste, 7% is intermediate-level waste, and 3% is high-level waste.

- A uranium fuel pellet (~1/2 in. height and diameter) contains the energy equivalent of one ton of coal or 1.49 gallons of oil. Typical reactors hold 18 million pellets.
- Each kWh of nuclear electricity requires 0.1-0.3 kWh of life cycle energy inputs.
- Although nuclear electricity generation itself produces no GHG emissions, other fuel cycle activities do release emissions.
Nuclear Waste

- The U.S. annually accumulates about 2,000 metric tons of spent fuel.27
- During reactor operation, fission products and transuranics that absorb neutrons accumulate, requiring a third of the fuel to be replaced every 12-18 months. Spent fuel is 95% non-fissile U-238, 3% fission products, 1% fissile U-235, and 1% plutonium.28
- Spent fuel is placed in a storage pool of circulating cooled water to absorb heat and block the high radioactivity of fission products.29
- Many countries, though not the U.S., reprocess used nuclear fuel. The process reduces waste and extracts 25-30% more energy than non-reprocessed fuel.30
- Many U.S. spent fuel pools are reaching capacity, necessitating the use of dry cask storage. Dry casks, large concrete and stainless steel containers, are designed to passively cool radioactive waste and withstand natural disasters or large impacts. In 2011, 27% of spent fuel was held in dry casks, after sufficient cooling in storage pools.31
- Currently, 35 states have complexes designed for interim storage of spent nuclear fuel, or Independent Spent Fuel Storage Installations (ISFSI).32
- Ten years after use, the surface of a spent fuel assembly releases 10,000 rem/hr of radiation (in comparison, a dose of 500 rem is lethal to humans if received all at once).33 Managing nuclear waste requires very long-term planning. U.S. EPA was required to set radiation exposure limits in permanent waste storage facilities over an unprecedented timeframe—one million years.34
- The U.S. has no permanent storage site. Nevada’s Yucca Mountain was to hold 70,000 metric tons waste, but is no longer under consideration, mostly due to political pressure and opposition by Nevadans.35,36
- The Nuclear Waste Policy Act required the U.S. federal government to begin taking control of spent nuclear fuel in 1998. When this did not occur, the government became liable for the costs associated with storage at reactor sites.37

Safety and Public Policy

- In 1986, a series of explosions occurred at the Chernobyl power plant in Ukraine. Pieces of the reactor were ejected as high as the atmosphere. The lack of water in the reactor allowed the fuel to heat to the point of core meltdown. 134 workers and emergency responders were diagnosed with acute radiation syndrome and 28 died within weeks.38
- On March 11, 2011, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake occurred near Fukushima, Japan. The resulting tsunami damaged the reactor cooling system, leading to 3 meltdowns and hydrogen explosions. No deaths or radiation sickness have been directly linked to the accident.39
- The U.S. Price-Anderson Act limits the liability of nuclear plant owners if a radioactive release occurs to $450 million for individual plants and $13.5 billion across all plants.40
- Incentives for new nuclear plants include a production tax credit of 1.8¢/kWh of electricity generated, $18.5 billion for federal loan guarantees, and insurance against regulatory delays.41

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24. WNA (2017) “In Situ Leach Mining of Uranium.”
34. Los Angeles Times (2019) “Americans are paying more than ever to store deadly nuclear waste.”
37. WNA (2020) “Fukushima Daiichi Accident.”

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Geothermal Energy

Geothermal Resource and Potential

• Geothermal energy is derived from the natural heat of the earth. It exists in both high enthalpy (volcanoes, geysers) and low enthalpy forms (heat stored in rocks in the Earth’s crust). Nearly all heating and cooling applications utilize low enthalpy heat.
• Geothermal energy has two primary applications: heating/cooling and electricity generation.
• Ground source heat pumps for heating and cooling use 79% less energy than traditional heating and cooling systems.
• The U.S. has tapped less than 0.7% of geothermal electricity resources; the majority can become available with Enhanced Geothermal System technology.
• In 2016, there were 3,812 MW of geothermal electricity plants in operation in the United States—the most of any country—and development has been growing at a rate of 2% per year.
• Electricity generated from geothermal plants is projected to increase from 16 billion kWh in 2019 to 52.2 billion kWh in 2050. In 2016, California, Nevada, Utah, and Hawaii were the states with the most installed geothermal energy capacity.
• The U.S., Indonesia, Philippines, Turkey, New Zealand, and Mexico had 72% of global installed geothermal power capacity in 2019.

Geothermal Technology and Impacts

Direct Use and Heating/Cooling

• Geothermal (or ground source) heat pumps (GHPs) are the primary method for direct use of geothermal energy. GHPs use the shallow ground as an energy reservoir because it maintains a nearly constant temperature between 50-60°F (10–16°C).
• GHPs transfer heat from a building to the ground during the cooling season, and from the ground into a building during the heating season.
• Direct-use applications include space and district heating, greenhouses, aquaculture, and commercial and industrial processes.

Electricity Generation

• Geothermal energy currently accounts for 0.4% of net electricity generation in the United States.
• The U.S. continues to generate the most geothermal electricity in the world: more than 3.5 gigawatts, mostly in Western states.
• Hydrothermal energy, typically supplied by underground water reservoirs, is a main source of thermal energy used in electricity generation. The water is often pumped as steam to the earth’s surface to spin turbines that generate electricity.
• Dry steam power plants use steam from a geothermal reservoir and route it directly through turbines, which drive generators to produce electricity.
• Flash steam power plants pump hot water under high pressure into a surface tank at much lower pressure. This pressure change causes the water to rapidly “flash” into steam, which is then used to spin a turbine/generator to produce electricity. Flash steam plants are the most common type of geothermal power plants.
• Binary cycle power plants feature geothermal water and a working fluid that are confined to separate circulating systems, or “closed loops.” A heat exchanger transfers heat from the water to the working fluid, causing it to “flash” to steam, which then powers the turbine/generator to produce electricity.
• Enhanced Geothermal System (EGS) is a technology under development that could expand the use of geothermal resources to new geographic areas. EGS creates a subsurface fracture system to increase the permeability of rock and allow for the injection of a heat transfer fluid (typically water). Injected fluid is heated by the rock and returned to the surface to generate electricity.
• According to the U.S. Department of Energy, there may be over 100 GW of geothermal electric capacity in the continental U.S., which would account for nearly 10% of current U.S. electricity capacity and be 40 times the current installed geothermal capacity.
Installation, Manufacturing, and Cost

- The main stages of geothermal power development are resource exploration, drilling, reservoir/plant development, and power generation.19
- Capital costs for conventional geothermal power plants in the U.S. are approximately $2,500 per installed kilowatt of capacity.20
- Although the development of geothermal power requires a large capital investment, geothermal has low operating costs and a high capacity factor (ratio of actual power production to production potential).20
- Geothermal electricity costs between 7.8-22.5¢ per kilowatt-hour (kWh) in 2016. As of May 2020, geothermal plants qualified for the federal Production Tax Credit.5

Energy Performance and Environmental Impacts

- An average U.S. coal power plant emits roughly 35 times more carbon dioxide (CO₂) per kWh electricity generated than a geothermal power plant.18
- Binary cycle power plants and flash power plants consume around 0.24-4.21 gallons and 1.59-2.84 gallons of water per kWh, respectively (compared to 15 gallons of water per kWh used by thermoelectric plants in 2016).7,19
- Each year, U.S. geothermal electricity offsets the emission of 4.1 million tons of CO₂, 80 thousand tons of nitrogen oxides, and 110 thousand tons of particulate matter from coal-powered plants.8
- The U.S. DOE is actively funding research into combining carbon capture and storage with geothermal energy production, although the risks of long-term and high-volume geologic carbon sequestration are uncertain.21,22
- Some geothermal facilities produce solid waste that must be disposed of in approved sites, though some by-products can be recovered and recycled.23

Solutions and Sustainable Actions

Funding Opportunities

- There are currently 16 national laboratories and research institutions in the U.S. conducting research into geothermal energy technologies.24
- With a capacity factor of over 90%, geothermal electricity generation could offset coal, natural gas, or nuclear power as baseload supply in the electricity market.27
- Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory estimates that 45% of renewable energy growth in the U.S. can be attributed to state Renewable Portfolio Standards (RPS) that require a percentage of electricity be derived from renewable sources.25
- Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs) are sold by renewable energy producers in addition to the electricity they produce; for a few cents per kilowatt hour, consumers can purchase RECs to “offset” their usage and help renewable energy become more competitive.26
- A federal tax credit for homeowners covers 26% of qualifying ground source heat pump system costs in 2020, stepping down to 22% in 2021.27
- Around 850 utilities in the U.S. offer consumers the option to purchase renewable energy, or “green power.”28
- Many companies purchase renewable energy as part of their environmental programs. Google, Microsoft, Intel, Equinix, and Bank of America were the top five users of renewable energy as of April 2020.29

31. Photo courtesy of National Renewable Energy Laboratory.
Unconventional Fossil Fuels

Patterns of Use
Globally, fossil fuels supply 81% of primary energy. In 2019, 80% of U.S. primary energy consumption came from fossil fuels. Conventional and unconventional fossil fuels differ in their geologic locations and accessibility; conventional fuels are often found in discrete, easily accessible reservoirs, while unconventional fuels are found in pore spaces throughout a wide geologic formation, requiring advanced extraction techniques. If unconventional oil resources (oil shale, oil sands, extra heavy oil, and natural bitumen) are accounted for, the global oil reserves quadruple current conventional reserves. The price of crude oil peaked in 2008 at $145.31 per barrel, making unconventional fossil fuels more cost-competitive. However, in 2020, the price of crude oil temporarily fell below zero. Partially due to sustained low oil prices, over 200 oil and gas producers have filed for bankruptcy since 2015. The Energy Policy Act of 2005 includes provisions to promote U.S. oil sands, oil shale, and unconventional natural gas development.

Major Unconventional Sources
Unconventional Natural Gas
- Unconventional natural gas (UG) comes primarily from three sources: shale gas found in low-permeability shale formations; tight gas found in low-permeability sandstone and carbonate reservoirs; and coalbed methane (CBM) found in coal seams.
- Although several countries have begun producing UG, many global resources have yet to be assessed. According to current estimates, China has the largest technically recoverable shale gas resource with 1,115 trillion cubic feet (Tcf), followed by Argentina (802 Tcf) and Algeria (707 Tcf). Global tight gas resources are estimated at 2,684 Tcf, with the largest in Asia/Pacific and Latin America. Resources of CBM are estimated at 1,660 Tcf, with more than 75% in Eastern Europe/Eurasia and Asia/Pacific.
- Recoverable U.S. resources are estimated at 161 Tcf from shale and tight gas and 105 Tcf from CBM.
- UG, particularly shale and tight gas, is most commonly extracted through hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking.” A mixture of fluid (usually water) and sand is pumped underground at extreme pressures to create cracks in the geologic formation, allowing gas to flow out. When the pressure is released, a portion of the fluid returns as “flowback,” and the sand remains as a “proppant,” keeping the fractures open.
- UG accounted for 87% of total U.S. natural gas production in 2019 and is expected to account for 92% of production by 2050.

Tight Oil
- Tight oil, or shale oil, is found in impermeable rocks such as shale or limestone and is extracted through fracking and is often extracted concurrently with natural gas.
- Over the past decade, tight oil production has expanded significantly. In 2019, 63% (7.7 million barrels per day) of crude oil production in the U.S. came from tight oil. Top tight oil producing states include Texas, North Dakota, New Mexico, Colorado, and Oklahoma.
- It is estimated that the U.S. has 174 Bbbl of technically recoverable tight oil.
- Negative health effects in newborns from in utero exposure to fracking sites have been found.

Oil Sands
- Oil sands, i.e., “tar sands” or “natural bitumen,” are a combination of sand (83%), bitumen (10%), water (4%), and clay (3%). Bitumen is a semisolid, tar-like mixture of hydrocarbons.
- Known oil sands deposits exist in 23 countries. Canada has 73% of global estimated oil sands, approximately 2.4 trillion barrels (bbls) of oil. The U.S. has 1.6% of global oil sands resources; however, 56% of U.S. crude oil imports came from Canada in 2019, and 64% of Canadian production comes from oil sands.
- Deposits less than 250 feet below the surface are mined and processed to separate the bitumen. Deeper deposits employ in situ (underground) methods, including steam or solvent injection to liquify the bitumen so that it can be extracted from the ground. Bitumen must be upgraded to synthetic crude oil (SCO) before it is refined into petroleum products.
- Two tons of oil sands produce one barrel of SCO.

Oil Shale
- Oil shale is a sedimentary rock with deposits of organic compounds called kerogen, which has not undergone enough geologic pressure, heat, and time to become conventional oil. Oil shale can be heated to generate petroleum-like liquids.
- Oil shale deposits exist in 33 countries. The U.S. has the largest oil shale resource in the world, approximately 6 trillion bbls of oil in place, however, oil shale is far from commercial development.
**Life Cycle Impacts**

**Greenhouse Gases**
- Fossil fuel combustion accounted for 75% of U.S. greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in 2018.  
- Equivalent amounts of GHGs are released by conventional and unconventional fuels at the point of use. Life cycle emissions for unconventional oil are higher than conventional oil on average, though some studies suggest they are similar. Studies have found life cycle emissions for oil sands are 17% higher than average refined U.S. crude, and oil shale emissions are 21% to 47% higher than conventional oil. Studies of life cycle emissions for UG have resulted in estimates from 6% lower to 43% higher than conventional natural gas sources.
- Overall, natural gas generates fewer GHG emissions when combusted than other fossil fuels. Natural gas, however, is primarily methane (\(\text{CH}_4\)) and \(\text{CH}_4\) leakage can significantly decrease any emissions benefit of natural gas over other fossil fuels. \(\text{CH}_4\) leakage from the U.S. oil and natural gas supply chain is estimated to be 13 million metric tons (MMT) per year, equivalent to 2.3% of U.S. annual gross natural gas production and nearly 42% of U.S. anthropogenic \(\text{CH}_4\) emissions. With a global warming potential of 28, this leakage is equivalent to 364 MMT of \(\text{CO}_2\) or 5% of total U.S. GHG emissions in 2018.

**Water**
- Producing one barrel of oil from oil shale uses 1 to 12 barrels of water for in-situ production and 2 to 4 barrels of water for mining production; one barrel of oil from oil sands uses 0.4 to 3.1 barrels of water. Producing one barrel of oil in Saudi Arabia requires 1.4 barrels of water.
- A horizontal well can require 2 to 4 million gallons of water to drill and fracture. One study found shale gas production consumes up to four times more water than producing conventional natural gas.
- CBM production requires groundwater extraction; U.S. CBM basins withdraw 32 million to 15 billion gallons of water from aquifers per year.
- Wastewater, produced water, and flowback water from oil and gas extraction can contain excess salts, high levels of trace elements, and naturally-occurring radioactive materials. Groundwater can be polluted through above- and below-ground activities, including construction, drilling, chemical spills, leaks, and discharge of wastewater.

**Land Impacts and Waste**
- More than 75% of U.S. oil shale is on federal land, of which 678,700 acres has been designated for development. A 20,000 bbl/day oil sands facility requires 2,950 acres of land and creates 52,000 tons/day of sand waste; a 25,000-30,000 bbl/day oil shale facility requires 300-1,200 acres.
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**Solutions and Sustainable Alternatives**
- Chemicals used in hydraulic fracturing fluid are often considered proprietary. Requiring companies to disclose these chemicals will lead to better understanding of the risk to public health from their use.
- Careful siting and monitoring of injection wells can reduce the potential for seismic events.
- Water consumption in oil and gas extraction can be significantly reduced through efficiency improvements and the recycling of wastewater.
- Support policies that increase energy efficiency and renewable energy use. Although natural gas has been considered preferable to other fossil fuels because of the assumed benefit of natural gas over other fossil fuels, it is important to consider the environmental impacts of natural gas production and use.

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U.S. Grid Energy Storage

Electrical Energy Storage (EES) refers to the process of converting electrical energy into a stored form that can later be converted back into electrical energy when needed. Batteries are one of the most common forms of electrical energy storage, ubiquitous in most peoples' lives. The first battery—called Volta's cell—was developed in 1800. The first U.S. large-scale energy storage facility was the Rocky River Pumped Storage plant in 1929, on the Housatonic River in Connecticut. Research in energy storage has increased dramatically, especially after the first U.S. oil crisis in the 1970s, and resulted in advancements in the cost and performance of rechargeable batteries. The impact energy storage can have on the current and future sustainable energy grid is substantial.

- EES systems are characterized by rated power in megawatts (MW) and energy storage capacity in megawatt-hours (MWh).
- In 2020, the U.S. had over 23.2 GW of capacity in energy storage compared to 1,100 GW of total installed generation capacity. Globally, installed energy storage capacity totaled 173.6 GW. 1,355 energy storage projects were operational globally in 2020, with 11 projects under construction. 40% of operational projects are located in the U.S. California leads the U.S. in energy storage with 215 operational projects (4.2 GW), followed by Hawaii, New York, and Texas.

Deployed Technologies

Key EES technologies include: Pumped Hydroelectric Storage (PHS), Compressed Air Energy Storage (CAES), Advanced Battery Energy Storage (ABES), Flywheel Energy Storage (FES), Thermal Energy Storage (TES), and Hydrogen Energy Storage (HES). PHS and CAES are large-scale technologies capable of discharge times of tens of hours and power capacities up to 1 GW, but are geographically limited. ABES and FES have lower power and shorter discharge times (from seconds to 6 hours), but are often not limited by geography.

**Pumped Hydroelectric Storage (PHS)**
- PHS systems pump water from a low to high reservoir and, when electricity is needed, water is released through a hydroelectric turbine, generating electrical energy from kinetic energy.
- 96% of global energy storage is from PHS.
- PHS plants have long lifetimes (50-60 years) and have operational efficiencies of between 70 and 85%.

**Compressed Air Energy Storage (CAES)**
- CAES systems store compressed air in an underground cavern. To create electricity, the pressurized air is heated and expanded in a natural gas combustion turbine, driving a generator.
- Existing CAES plants are based on the diabatic method, where the compression of the combustion air is separate from the gas turbine. The diabatic method can generate 3 times the output for every natural gas input, reduce CO_{2} emissions by 40-60%, and enable plant efficiencies of 42-55%.
- As of August 2019, there were 2 CAES plants operating in the U.S. and Germany. The U.S. facility is a 110 MW plant in Alabama.

**Advanced Battery Energy Storage (ABES)**
- ABES stores electrical energy in the form of chemical energy, which is then converted back into electricity when needed.
- Batteries contain two electrodes (anode and cathode) composed of different materials and an electrolyte that separates the electrodes. The electrolyte enables the flow of ions between the two electrodes and external wires to allow for electrical charge to flow.
- The U.S. has several operational battery-related energy storage projects based on lead-acid, lithium-ion, nickel-based, sodium-based, and flow batteries. These batteries account for 0.74 GW of rated power in 2020 and have round-trip efficiencies (the ratio of net energy discharged to the grid to the net energy used to charge the battery) between 60-95%.

**Flywheel Energy Storage (FES)**
- FES is mainly used for power management rather than longer-term energy storage. FES systems store kinetic energy by spinning a rotor in a frictionless enclosure. The rotor is sped up or down to shift energy to or from the grid, which steadies the power supply.
Applications

EES systems have many applications, including energy arbitrage, generation capacity deferral, ancillary services, ramping, transmission and distribution capacity deferral, and end-user applications (e.g., managing energy costs, power quality and service reliability, and renewable curtailment). EES can operate at partial output levels with fewer losses and can respond quickly to adjustments in electricity demand. Much of the current energy infrastructure is approaching—or beyond—its intended lifetime. Storing energy in off-peak hours and using that energy during peak hours saves money and prolongs the lifetime of energy infrastructure. Round-trip efficiency, annual degradation, and generator heat rate have a moderate to strong influence on the environmental performance of grid connected energy storage. Energy storage will help with the adoption of renewable energy by storing excess energy for times when intermittent renewable energy sources are unavailable.

Solutions

Research & Development

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) administered $185 million of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding to support 16 large-scale energy storage projects with a combined power capacity of over 0.53 GW.

Storage technologies are becoming more efficient and economically viable. One study found that the economic value of energy storage in the U.S. is $228.4 billion over a 10 year period. Lithium-ion batteries are one of the fastest-growing energy storage technologies due to their high energy densities, high power, near 100% efficiency, and low self-discharge. The U.S. has 650,000 tonnes of lithium in reserves; globally, there are 17 million tonnes of reserves.

Long-term (10-100 hours) and seasonal (100+ hours) energy storage are also important areas of research. Hydrogen, compressed air, and hydropower are the most viable technologies for these types of storage.

Policy & Standardization

The Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 enabled an Energy Storage Subcommittee to form through the Electricity Advisory Committee (EAC), whose members assess and advise the U.S. DOE every two years on progress of domestic energy storage goals.

In 2010, California approved Assembly Bill 2514, requiring the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to set and meet energy storage procurement targets for investor-owned utilities, totaling 1.33 GW of storage capacity completed by 2020 and implemented by 2024. Massachusetts, Oregon, Nevada, New Jersey, and New York all have similar mandates.

In 2018, the U.S. Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) issued Order No. 841, which requires wholesale electricity markets to establish participation models that recognize energy storage’s physical and operational characteristics.

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U.S. Material Use

Patterns of Use
Raw materials are extracted, converted to engineered and commodity materials, and manufactured into products. After use, they are disposed of or returned to the economy through reuse, remanufacturing, or recycling. Sustainability in material use has three components: 1) the relationship between the rate of resource consumption and the overall stock of resources; 2) the efficiency of resource use in providing essential services; and 3) the proportion of resources leaking from the economy and impacting the environment. The first two topics reflect the sustainability of resource supply, while the third affects the sustainability of ecosystems. The United States is a primary user of natural resources, including fossil fuels and materials.

- U.S. raw material (non-fossil fuel or food) use rose 3.14 times more than the population from 1910 to 2014. 1,2,3
- After rising 62% from 1970 to 2005, total material consumption in the U.S. (including fuels and other materials) reached 6.0 billion metric tons in 2017, which is still 12% higher than 1970 levels of material consumption. 4
- In 2017, U.S. per capita total material consumption (including fuels) was 18.6 metric tons, 42% higher than Europe. 5
- After increasing by 30% from 1996 to 2006, U.S. raw material use decreased 13% from 2006 to 2010 following the global financial crisis. 1
- Construction materials, including stone, gravel, and sand comprise around three-quarters of raw materials use. 1
- The use of renewable materials decreased dramatically over the last century—from 41% to 5% of total materials by weight—as the U.S. economy shifted from agriculture to industrial production. 6
- The ratio of global reserve to production rate is an indicator of the adequacy of mineral supplies; it can range from a few centuries (aluminum, chromium, lithium, platinum, phosphate rock), to several decades (copper, gold, iron). 7
- Rare earth elements (REEs) are a group of 17 elements used in metal alloys, batteries, and as catalysts, with 75% used as catalysts. 7,8 Substitutes for REEs are available but are less effective. 7 China controlled more than 62% of REE production in 2019. 7

Intensity of Raw Material Use
- Material intensity of use refers to the amount of material consumed per unit of economic output, generally measured by the total gross domestic product (GDP) of a country. 9
- 44% of materials consumed in the U.S. economy are added to long-term (+30 years) domestic stock, 2% remain in stock between 2-30 years, 39% remain in stock less than 2 years, and the remaining 15% are recycled back into the economy. 11
- Of the materials remaining in domestic stock less than 30 years, 73% are released into the atmosphere (mostly through fossil fuel combustion), 18% are disposed of in controlled areas (e.g., landfills, tailings ponds), and the remaining 9% are dispersed directly into the environment on land, in water, or through multiple paths. 11
- There is an appreciable decline in the use intensity of primary metals (except aluminum), while plastics use continues to grow. 18
- The composition of materials used in the U.S. economy has become less dense, i.e., less iron and steel and more lighter metals, plastics, and composites. 13
- The domestic processed output, or total weight of materials and emissions produced by the domestic economy, declined per unit of GDP by about 44% in the U.S. over the last few decades, similar to other industrialized nations. 11

Environmental Impacts
- In 2017, it was estimated that only 8% of plastics disposed of in the U.S. were recycled. A further 2% “leaked” into the environment, often in the form of microplastics from tire abrasion and synthetic textiles, which is of growing concern globally due to impacts on organisms and unknown health consequences in humans. 17
• Mines and quarries, including coal but excluding oil and natural gas, occupy 0.3% of the land area in the U.S., of which 60% is used for excavation and the rest for disposal of overburden and other mining wastes.1

• As higher grade reserves are depleted, the quality of metal is degrading, leading to greater energy needed to extract and process ore, and thus greater releases of gases that contribute to climate change and acid precipitation.19

• The primary metals and metal mining sectors accounted for 56% of the total 3.8 billion pounds of toxic releases in 2018.20

• In 2017, over 35 million metric tons of Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) regulated hazardous waste were generated in the U.S. The largest sources were chemical manufacturing (58%) and petroleum and coal products manufacturing (16%).19

• In 2014, primary metal industries used 1.6 Quadrillion Btu (quads) of energy; nonmetallic mineral (stone, clay, glass, cement) manufacturing used 0.8 quads; chemical manufacturing used 6.3 quads; petroleum/coal products used 4.2 quads (total U.S. consumption was 98.3 quads).20,23

• Energy-related carbon dioxide emissions from the industrial sector have fallen 20% since 2000, mainly due to a structural shift away from energy-intensive manufacturing in the U.S. economy.23

• Human health risks arise from emissions and residues over a material’s life cycle. In many cases, pollutant releases have been substantially reduced from historical levels, e.g., mercury released by gold mining, fugitive volatile organic compound emissions from paints, and lead from the combustion of gasoline. However, in 2018, more than 425,000 tons of lead and lead compounds were released; 93% came from metal mining, while metal production and electric utilities accounted for 3.1% and 0.5%, respectively.20 New chemicals have been introduced that persist in the environment, bioaccumulate (move up the food chain), and/or are toxic, e.g., phthalates that are used in consumer products to make plastics soft and flexible.34

**Solutions and Sustainable Actions**

- **Conserve materials:** “Reduce, Reuse, Remanufacture, and Recycle.” U.S. recycling and remanufacturing industries accounted for over 757,000 jobs and more than $36 billion in revenue in 2007.21 In 2017, 35.2% of municipal solid waste in the U.S. was recovered for recycling and composting, diverting more than 94 million tons of material from landfills and incinerators.59

- **Change the material composition of products:** Create products using materials that are less toxic, easily recyclable, and less energy intensive to make. There are over 163 million commercially available chemicals.67

- **Reduce material intensity:** Technological advances can help reduce the raw material intensity of products while making them lighter and more durable. Aluminum beverage cans are 38% lighter today than they were three decades ago, allowing more cans to be produced from the same amount of aluminum. Beverage cans are also made with an average of 73% recycled aluminum, representing a huge decrease in energy requirements and greenhouse gas emissions compared to using virgin materials.68

- **Promote product stewardship:** Appropriate policy and regulatory frameworks can help ensure product manufacturers’ responsibility for the environmentally conscious management of retired products. The European Union’s regulations on waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) included a target of an 85% increase in proper WEEE collection and disposal.20 It also has an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policy that seeks to shift responsibility for life cycle environmental impacts from governments to producers.30

- **Encourage renewable material use:** Biobased materials such as polyactic acid (PLA), a biodegradable polymer, can provide performance similar to petroleum-based plastics. Manufacturing these materials may require less energy and emits fewer greenhouse gases, but the use of land and chemicals required to grow the feedstock may have adverse environmental consequences.31

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October 2020
Municipal Solid Waste

Municipal Solid Waste (MSW), commonly called “trash” or “garbage,” includes wastes such as durable goods (e.g., tires, furniture), nondurable goods (e.g., newspapers, plastic plates/cups), containers and packaging (e.g., milk cartons, plastic wrap), and other wastes (e.g., yard waste, food). This category of waste generally refers to common household waste, as well as office and retail wastes, but excludes industrial, hazardous, and construction wastes. The handling and disposal of MSW is a growing concern as the volume of waste generated in the U.S. continues to increase.

Generation Statistics

• Total annual MSW generation in the U.S. has increased by 77% since 1980, to 268 million tons per year.1
• Per capita MSW generation increased by 23% over the same time period, from 3.7 to 4.5 pounds per person per day, although per capita generation has decreased slightly since 1990.1 For comparison, MSW generation rates (in lbs/person/day) are 2.7 in Sweden, 3.7 in Germany, and 2.8 in the United Kingdom.2 At the current per capita rate, an American weighing 180 pounds generates their own weight in MSW every 40 days.
• In 2017, per capita generation of MSW in the U.S. was 28 pounds per thousand dollars of GDP. The generation rate (in lbs/thousand dollars) was 20 in Sweden, 23 in the UK, and 28 in Germany.3,4
• Packaging, containers, and durable goods made up 51% of MSW generation in 2017. Most of the remainder was split between nondurable goods, food waste, and yard waste.1

Management Methods

Landfill

• In 2017, 52% of MSW generated in the U.S. was disposed of in 1,269 landfills.1,5
• The 2019 combined capacity of the two largest landfill corporations in the U.S. was 9.9 billion cubic yards.6
• Landfill disposal (“tipping”) fees in 2019 in the U.S. averaged $55.36 per ton, a 5.2% increase from 2018.7 Some local governments use the fees as a general income source, but there is still a lack of funding for research and technologies for waste diversion.8
• Environmental impacts of landfill disposal include loss of land area, emissions of methane (CH₄, a greenhouse gas) to the atmosphere, and potential leaching of hazardous materials to groundwater, though proper design reduces this possibility.9,10
• Landfills were the third largest source of U.S. anthropogenic CH₄ emissions in 2018, accounting for 111 million metric tons CO₂-equivalent emissions, about 1.7% of total GHG emissions.11

Combustion

• In 2017, 12.7% of MSW generated in the U.S. was disposed of through waste incineration with energy recovery.1
• Combustion reduces waste by 75-85% by weight and 85-95% by volume, leaving behind a residue called ash. A majority of this ash is landfilled, although recent attempts have been made to reuse the residue.12 In 2018, 68 power plants burned 23.5 million tons of MSW and generated about 14 billion kWh of electricity.13
• Biogenic MSW (paper, food, and yard waste) accounted for 51% (7.14 billion kWh) of the electricity produced, or about 0.2% of total U.S. electricity generation.14,15
• Incineration of MSW generates a variety of pollutants (CO₂, heavy metals, dioxins, particulates) that contribute to impacts such as climate change, smog, acidification, and human health impacts (asthma and heart and nervous system damage).16
Recycling and Composting

- In 2017, 35.2% of MSW (by weight) generated in the U.S. was recovered for recycling or composting, diverting 94.2 million tons of material from landfills and incinerators—about 2.8 times the amount diverted in 1990.1
- 29% of recovered MSW was composted.1
- Only 53% of people in the U.S. are automatically enrolled in recycling programs; 82% of cities with curbside recycling collect material single-stream, meaning materials such as glass and paper are separated at the recycling plant.10,14 The number of curbside programs in the U.S. has increased more than threefold since 1990.15,16
- 88% of corrugated boxes were recovered for recycling in 2017; other highly recycled products include lead-acid batteries (99%), newspapers (77%), major appliances (60%), and aluminum beverage cans (49%).1
- Common products with poor recycling rates include: carpet (8%), small appliances (6%), and furniture (0.3%).5

Solutions and Sustainable Alternatives

Source Reduction

- Source reduction activities help prevent materials from entering the MSW stream and are the most effective way to reduce waste generation.21
- Identify opportunities to reuse materials at home or in your community. Purchase items like furniture and appliances from reuse centers and consignment shops.
- Packaging and containers made up 50% of the MSW generated in 2017. Minimize the volume of packaging material required by selecting efficiently packaged products or buying in bulk.1
- Purchase products with post-consumer recycled content and encourage companies to implement source reduction programs.
- More than 2.5 million tons of paper and plastic plates and cups were disposed of in 2017. Choose reusable plates, cups, and silverware over disposable goods.4
- Food waste makes up 15.2% of MSW in the U.S., but only 6.3% is recovered or composted. Reduce food waste through efficient meal planning and composting of scraps.3

Encourage Supportive Public Policy

- Many communities have implemented Pay-As-You-Throw programs, designed to limit the volume of MSW per household by charging residents for waste collection based on the weight they throw away.12
- In 2018, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Environmental Protection Agency launched the Winning on Reducing Food Waste initiative, with a goal to reduce food loss and waste.15
- Implementation of curbside recycling and composting programs can help reduce the burden of waste disposal.
- Although most states restrict landfill disposal of certain materials, some states do not restrict the disposal of potentially hazardous items (e.g., oil, batteries, tires, and electronics).14
- Ten states (CA, CT, HI, IA, ME, MA, MI, NY, OR, and VT) have deposit laws that encourage the return of empty beverage containers for refunds.25

References


Critical Materials

Minerals are integral to the functioning of modern society. They are found in alloys, magnets, batteries, catalysts, phosphors, and polishing compounds, which in turn are integrated into countless products such as aircraft, communication systems, electric vehicles, lasers, naval vessels, and various types of consumer electronics and lighting. However, some of these minerals are in limited supply and techniques for their extraction incur high environmental and financial costs. Given their necessity in a plethora of technological applications, concern exists over whether supply can meet the needs of the economy in the future. Material criticality can be assessed in terms of supply risk, vulnerability to supply restriction, and environmental implications. Rare earth elements (REEs) are a group of 17 elements used in various products, many of which are vital for renewable energy and energy storage. No readily available substitutes exist for most REEs. Unless action is taken, the U.S. could face an annual shortfall of up to $3.2 billion worth of critical materials.

Critical Materials Categories

Energy Critical Elements

- Energy critical elements (ECEs) are elements integral to advanced energy production, transmission, and storage. This category includes lithium, cobalt, selenium, silicon, tellurium, indium, and REEs.
- An element might be classified as energy critical because of rarity in Earth’s crust, economically extractable ore deposits are rare, or lack of availability in the U.S. The U.S. is reliant on other countries for more than 90% of most ECEs used in the economy.
- Some ECEs form deposits on their own, others are obtained solely as byproducts or coproducts from the mining of other ores.
- Silicon, tellurium, and indium are necessary parts of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels.
- Platinum group elements (PGEs) are necessary components of fuel cells and have the potential for other advanced vehicle uses. Platinum and palladium production are concentrated in South Africa (72% and 38%, respectively) and Russia (12% and 41%, respectively).
- Lithium is an element of growing importance due to its use in batteries for cell phones, laptops, and electric vehicles. Chile, Bolivia, and Argentina account for nearly 60% of worldwide lithium reserves. Australia, Chile, China, and Argentina accounted for 96% of world lithium production in 2019.
- Efforts are underway to extract elements from lower quality resources. Lithium, along with materials such as vanadium and uranium, is present in seawater in small concentrations. Researchers have recently developed a method for extracting these materials from seawater.
- The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) defines materials criticality based on the material’s supply risk and importance to clean energy. As of 2011, DOE found five elements to be critical in the short-term (2011 to 2015) and medium-term (2015-2025): dysprosium, terbium, europium, neodymium, and yttrium. These elements are used in magnets for wind turbines and electric vehicles or as phosphors in energy efficient lighting.
- DOE’s Critical Materials Institute has more recently focused on key materials including graphite, manganese, cobalt, lithium, gallium, indium, and tellurium.
- Current DOE strategies for addressing material criticality include diversifying supply, developing substitutes, and improving reuse and recycling of critical materials.
- Copper is a key element in electrical wiring and appliances and may also be a limiting factor in future renewable energy deployment. At current production levels, existing copper resources may only last another 60 years and its extraction will become more energy intensive as ore quality decreases. Top copper producing countries include Chile (28.0%), Peru (12.0%), China (8.0%), and the U.S. (6.5%). Copper is unique in that it does not degrade or lose its physical and chemical properties when it is recycled. In 2017, however, it was estimated that only 33% of copper used came from recycled sources.
Rare Earth Elements

- REEs are a particularly important group of critical minerals. Although these minerals are moderately abundant in Earth’s crust, they are distributed diffusely and thus difficult to extract in large quantities.13
- There are 17 REEs, including the lanthanide elements (atomic numbers 57 through 71 on the periodic table), scandium, and yttrium. Light REEs (LREEs) consist of elements 57 through 64, and heavy REEs (HREEs) consist of elements 65 - 71.1
- REEs have a variety of uses, including components in cell phones, energy efficient lighting, magnets, hybrid vehicle batteries, and catalysts for automobiles and petroleum refining.7 The REEs terbium, neodymium, praseodymium, and dysprosium are key components of the permanent magnets used in wind turbines.8 Substitutes for REEs are available but are less effective.7
- In 2019, China controlled more than 60% of REE production. The U.S. is 100% reliant on imports for 14 critical minerals and more than 75% reliant on imports for another 10. These materials are key to industrial and commercial processes as well as national defense.6
- The U.S. has increased REE production to 26,000 tonnes in 2019. U.S. REE reserves are estimated at 2.7 million tonnes. In comparison, China produced over 120,000 tonnes of REEs in both 2018 and 2019 and possesses reserves estimated at 44 million tonnes. Australia and Myanmar are making significant strides in REE extraction, but remain below 20% of China’s production capacity.7
- Demand for ECEs, coupled with rising mining standards in many countries, has caused production to shift to countries with low costs and lax environmental regulations, thus increasing the impacts of ECE extraction. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that developing nations naturally contain greater quantities of ECE ore deposits.5

Life Cycle Impacts

- Mining is a destructive process that disrupts the environment and widely disperses waste. Chemical compounds used in extraction processes can enter the air, surface water, and groundwater near mines.24
- The grinding and crushing of ore containing critical elements often releases dust, which can have carcinogenic and negative respiratory effects on exposed workers and nearby residents.24
- Beyond health impacts, mining can also negatively impact human rights. For example, the Democratic Republic of Congo is the world’s leading producer of cobalt, a metal widely used in advanced battery technology, but as a result of lax regulation and oversight, widespread child labor has been documented in informal and artisanal mining practices.25
- Some REE deposits contain thorium and uranium, which pose significant radiation hazards. While thorium and uranium can be used to generate nuclear energy, in this case they are rarely commercially recoverable and thus are left in the tailings, where they can pose risks to environmental and human health.3
- Recycling critical materials results in much lower human health and environmental impacts compared to mining virgin material. Nevertheless, improper recycling and recovery procedures, which often occur in developing nations where regulations to limit worker exposure are lax or nonexistent, can lead to exposure to carcinogenic and toxic materials.24

Solutions and Sustainable Alternatives

- Recycle your electronics. Currently, less than 1% of REEs are recycled. Every year, thousands of electronic products such as cell phones, televisions, and computers are thrown away. Metals recovered from these products can be effectively reused or recycled.4
- Buy refurbished rather than new products. Rent products from companies with extensive take-back programs that require material recycling.5
- Support government programs like the DOE’s Advanced Manufacturing Office, which funds projects related to reducing environmental impacts, lowering costs, and improving the process of manufacturing clean energy technologies in the U.S.27

U.S. Food System

Americans enjoy a diverse abundance of low-cost food, spending a mere 9.5% of disposable income on food. However, store prices do not reflect the external costs—economic, social, and environmental—that impact the sustainability of the food system. Considering the full life cycle of the U.S. food system illuminates the connection between consumption behaviors and production practices.

Patterns of Use

### Agricultural Production

- Farmers account for 1% of the population. Almost 28% of these farmers are between the ages of 55 to 64.  
- Large-scale family farms and industrial nonfamily farms account for only 4.8% of farms, but 58.3% of production (in $). Small-scale family farms represent nearly 90% of U.S. farms, but only 21.1% of production. 
- Just 14.6¢ of every dollar spent on food in 2018 went back to the farm; in 1975, it was 40¢. 
- Between 2014 and 2016, 48% of the hired agricultural labor force lacked authorization to work in the United States. 
- From 1992 to 2012, total cropland decreased from 460 million acres to 392 million acres. 
- Many parts of the U.S., including agricultural regions, are experiencing increasing groundwater depletion (withdrawal exceeds recharge rate). In 2014, 142 million acre-feet of water were used for irrigation - 52% of this water came from surface-water sources. 
- In 2017, the amount of irrigated farmland in the U.S. was over 58 million acres, more than 2 million more acres than in 2012. 
- Nutrient runoff from the upper agricultural regions of the Mississippi River watershed creates a hypoxic “dead zone” in the Gulf of Mexico. The 2017 hypoxic dead zone was the largest measured since 1985, at 8,776 sq mi. 
- From 2007 to 2012, pesticide use increased by 10% while herbicide use increased by 20% from 2010 to 2014. In 2012, the U.S. agriculture sector used 899 million pounds of pesticides. 
- In 2000, 25% of corn, 61% of cotton, and 54% of soybeans planted were genetically engineered; by 2020, these percentages increased to 92%, 96%, and 94%, respectively. 
- The UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization estimates 75 billion metric tons of soil are lost to erosion annually on fertile lands. 
- Agriculture was responsible for 9.3% of total U.S. greenhouse gas (GHGs) emissions in 2018. Methane (CH4), nitrous oxide (N2O), and carbon dioxide (CO2) are the main GHGs emitted by agricultural activities. Livestock and soil management are major contributors.

### Consumption Patterns

- In 2010, the U.S. food supply provided 4,000 calories per person per day. Accounting for waste, the average American consumed 2,507 calories per day in 2010, an increase of 22% from 1970. 
- In 2017, 195 lbs of meat per person were available for consumption, up 25 lbs from 1967. Although red meat consumption declined almost 30% since the 1970s, chicken consumption increased steadily. 
- 31% of grains grown are used to feed animals. 
- 39.5 teaspoons of sweeteners are available per capita in the U.S. daily; the American Heart Association recommends limiting added sugars to 6 and 9 teaspoons daily for average females and males, respectively. 
- Approximately 40% of U.S. adults and over 18% of 12-19 year old are obese (BMI > 30). 
- Diet plays a significant role in health. Diets lacking fruits and vegetables can increase risk of heart disease, certain cancers, and stroke—leading causes of U.S. deaths. 
- The EPA estimated that in 2010, 31% of the food supply was lost, 50% more than in 1970. In 2017, more food reached landfills than any other material. This waste accounts for roughly 15% of the municipal solid waste stream and represents a loss of $450 per person each year. One estimate suggests that 2% of total annual energy use in the U.S. is used to produce food that is later wasted.
Life Cycle Impacts

The energy used by a system is often a useful indicator of its sustainability. Food-related energy use accounts for over 12% of the national energy budget. Agriculture and the food system as a whole have developed a dependence on fossil energy; 13 units of (primarily) fossil energy are input for every unit of food energy available.\(^5\)

- Food production of U.S. self-selected diets amounts to 4.7 kg CO\(_2e\) and 25.2 MJ fossil fuel energy demand per capita per day.\(^3\)
- Reliance on fossil fuel inputs makes the food system increasingly vulnerable to oil price fluctuations.\(^4\)
- Consolidation of farms, food processing operations, and distribution warehouses often increases distance between food sources and consumers.\(^5\)
- Consolidation in the food system is also concentrating management decisions into fewer hands. For example: Four firms control 85% of the beef packing market; 82% of soybean processing is controlled by four firms.\(^3\)
- The top four food retailers sold almost 45% of America's food in 2016, compared to only 17% in 1993.\(^4\)

Solutions and Sustainable Alternatives

Eat Less Meat

Meat-based diets use more energy to produce than vegetarian diets, one study suggests twice as much.\(^4\) One serving of beef has more associated greenhouse gas emissions than 20 servings of vegetables.\(^5\) Meat production as it is widely practiced today also has significant environmental impacts on land use, water use, and water pollution.\(^6\) 20% of Americans cause half of the food-related GHG emissions; a diet shift away from meat could reduce this, with some studies estimating reductions of up to 73%.\(^4\)\(^7\)

Reduce Waste

Much of household food waste is due to spoilage. Prevent food from going bad by buying smaller amounts; planning meals and sticking to shopping lists; and freezing, canning, or preserving extra produce.\(^8\) Direct-to-consumer meal kits are growing in popularity. By streamlining the supply chain, and reducing food waste and last-mile transportation, meal kits are responsible for 25% lower GHG emissions than a store bought meal.\(^9\) Many foods that are still safe are thrown out due to confusion about “sell-by” and “use-by” dates; for further information, see the USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service.\(^10\) Whether washing dishes manually or in a dishwasher, save water and energy by using best practices such as not letting water run constantly, rinsing in cold water, only run dishwashers with full loads, and avoid pre-rinsing dishes.\(^11\)

Use Less Refrigeration

Home refrigeration accounts for 11% of all energy consumed by our food system.\(^12\) Today’s convenience foods rely heavily on refrigeration for preservation. Consider a smaller, more efficient refrigerator and buying smaller quantities of fresh produce more frequently. Refrigerator efficiency more than doubled from 1977 to 1997, but increases in size have largely offset this improvement.\(^6\)\(^12\)

Eat Organic

Organic farms do not use chemicals that require large amounts of energy to produce, pollute soil and water, and present human health impacts. Sales of organic food in 2019 were 5.0% higher than in 2018; organic food now accounts for 5.8% of all food sold in the U.S.\(^13\)

Eat Local

Transportation accounts for approximately 14% of the total energy used in the U.S. food system.\(^14\) There is significant room for improvement in how people acquire their food. Community Supported Agriculture and Farmers Markets are great ways to support your local food system.

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5. USDA, ERS (2020) Food Dollar Series.
10. USGS (2019) "Irrigation Water Use."
13. USDA, ERS (2012) "Adoption of Genetically Engineered Crops in the U.S."
19. USDA, ERS (2018) "Food Availability."
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44. State of Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (2017) "Food Transportation.”
U.S. Water Supply and Distribution

Patterns of Use

All life on Earth depends on water. Human uses include drinking, bathing, crop irrigation, electricity generation, and industrial activity. For some of these uses, the available water requires treatment prior to use. Over the last century, the primary goals of water treatment have remained the same—to produce water that is biologically and chemically safe, appealing to consumers, and non-corrosive and non-scaling. If water systems are mismanaged, public health emergencies can occur, such as in Flint, MI in 2014.

Water Uses

- In 2015, total U.S. water use was approximately 322 billion gallons per day (Bgal/d), 87% of which was freshwater. Thermoelectric power (133 Bgal/d) and irrigation (118 Bgal/d) accounted for the largest withdrawals.¹ Thermoelectric power plants use water for cooling. Though 41% of daily water use is for power generation, only 3% of these withdrawals are consumptive.¹ Irrigation includes water applied to agricultural crops along with the water used for landscaping, golf courses, parks, etc.¹
- In 2015, California and Texas accounted for 16% of U.S. water withdrawals.¹ These states along with Idaho, Florida, Arkansas, New York, Illinois, Colorado, North Carolina, Michigan, Montana, and Nebraska account for more than 50% of U.S. withdrawals.¹ Florida, New York, and Maryland accounted for 50% of saline water withdrawals.¹

Sources of Water

- Approximately 87% of the U.S. population relied on public water supply in 2015; the remainder relies on water from domestic wells.¹
- Surface sources account for 74% of all water withdrawals.¹
- Approximately 148,000 publicly owned water systems provide piped water for human consumption in 2020, of which roughly 50,000 (34%) are community water systems (CWSs). 9% of all CWSs provide water to 78% of the population.²
- In 2006, CWSs delivered an average of 96,000 gallons per year to each residential connection and 797,000 gallons per year to non-residential connections.³

Energy Consumption

- 2% of total U.S. electricity use goes towards pumping and treating water and wastewater, a 52% increase in electricity use since 1996.⁴ Cities, on average, use 3,100-3,600 kWh/million gallons of water delivered and treated. Electricity use accounts for around 80% of municipal water processing and distribution costs.⁵
- Groundwater supply from public sources requires 2,100 kWh/million gallons—about 31% more electricity than surface water supply, mainly due to higher water pumping requirements for groundwater systems.⁴
- The California State Water Project is the largest single user of energy in California, consuming between 6-9.5 billion kWh per year, partially offset by its own hydroelectric generation. In the process of delivering water from the San Francisco Bay-Delta to Southern California, the project uses 3%-4% of all electricity consumed in the state.⁶,⁷

Water Treatment

- The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA), enacted in 1974 and amended in 1986 and 1996, regulates contaminants in public water supplies, provides funding for infrastructure projects, protects sources of drinking water, and promotes the capacity of water systems to comply with SDWA regulations.⁸
- Typical parameters that the U.S.EPA uses to monitor the quality of drinking water include: microorganisms, disinfectants, radionuclides, organic and inorganic compounds.⁸
- 91% of CWSs are designed to disinfect water, 23% are designed to remove or sequester iron, 13% are designed to remove or sequester manganese, and 21% are designed for corrosion control.³
Life Cycle Impacts

Infrastructure Requirements
- The 2015 Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey and Assessment found that U.S. water systems need $472.6 billion of investment by 2035 to continue providing clean safe drinking water.19
- $312.6 billion of the total national investment need is for transmission and distribution. The needs are for treatment ($88.0 billion), storage ($47.6 billion), source development ($21.8 billion), and other systems ($75.3 billion).19
- Water systems maintain more than 2.2 million miles of transmission and distribution mains.16 In 2020, the average age of water pipes in the U.S. is 41 years old -- an increase in average age from 23 years old in 1970.12 240,000 main breaks occur each year in the U.S., disrupting supply and risking contamination of drinking water.12

Electricity Requirements
- Supplying fresh water to public agencies required about 39 billion kWh of electricity in 2011. This energy intensity increased by 39% beyond the 1996 values, mostly due to population growth and expansion of treatment facilities. This trend will likely continue in the coming years.6
- Household appliances contribute greatly to the energy burden. Dishwashers, showers, and faucets require 0.312 kWh/gallon, 0.143 kWh/gallon, and 0.139 kWh/gallon, respectively.15

Consumptive Use
- Consumptive use is an activity that draws water from a source within a basin and returns only a portion or none of the withdrawn water to the basin. The water might have been lost to evaporation, incorporated into a product such as a beverage and shipped out of the basin, or transpired into the atmosphere through the natural action of plants and leaves.1
- Agriculture accounts for the largest loss of water (80-90% of total U.S. consumptive water use).16 Of the 118 Bgal/d freshwater withdrawn for irrigation, over half is lost to consumptive use. Of the 133 Bgal/d of withdrawals for thermoelectric power in the U.S., 3% is consumed (4.31 Bgal/d).1

Solutions and Sustainable Alternatives

Supply Side
- Major components that offer significant energy efficiency improvement opportunities include pumping systems, pumps, and motors.16
- Periodic rehabilitation, repair, and replacement of water distribution infrastructure would help improve water quality and avoid leaks.17
- Right-sizing, upgrading to energy efficient equipment, and monitoring and control systems can optimize systems for the communities they serve, and save energy and water in the process.8
- Achieve on-site energy and chemical use efficiency to minimize the life cycle environmental impacts related to the production of energy and chemicals used in the treatment and distribution process.
- Reduce chemical use for treatment and sludge disposal by efficient process design, recycling of sludge, and recovery and reuse of chemicals.
- Generate energy on-site with renewable sources such as solar and wind.17
- Effective watershed management plans to protect source water are often more cost-effective and environmentally sound than treating contaminated water. For example, NYC chose to invest between $1-1.5 billion in a watershed protection project to improve the water quality in the Catskill/Delaware watershed rather than construct a new filtration plant at a capital cost of $6-8 billion.18
- Less than 4% of U.S. freshwater comes from brackish or saltwater, though this segment is growing. Desalination technology, such as reverse osmosis membrane filtering, unlocks large resources, but more research is needed to lower costs, energy use, and environmental impacts.4

Demand Side
- Better engineering practices:
  - Plumbing fixtures to reduce water consumption, e.g., high-efficiency toilets, low-flow showerheads, and faucet aerators.19
  - Water reuse and recycling, e.g., graywater systems and rain barrels.20
  - Efficient landscape irrigation practices.20
- Better planning and management practices:
  - Pricing and retrofit programs.27
  - Proper leak detection and metering.22
  - Residential water audit programs and public education programs.10

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U.S. Wastewater Treatment

Patterns of Use
For many years, humans have treated wastewater to protect human and ecological health from waterborne diseases. Since the early 1970s, effluent water quality has been improved at Publicly Owned Treatment Works (POTWs) and other point source discharges through major public and private investments prescribed by the Clean Water Act (CWA). Despite the improvement in effluent quality, point source discharges continue to be a significant contributor to the degradation of surface water quality. In addition, much of the existing wastewater infrastructure, including collection systems, treatment plants, and equipment, has deteriorated and is in need of repair or replacement.

Contamination and Impacts
- Pollutants contaminate receiving water via many pathways: point sources, non-point sources (e.g., air deposition, agriculture), sanitary sewer overflows, stormwater runoff, combined sewer overflows, and hydrologic modifications (e.g., channelization and dredging).
- 53% of river and stream miles, 71% of lake acres, 80% of estuarine square miles, and 98% of Great Lakes shoreline miles that have been assessed are classified as impaired (unacceptable for at least one designated use) by the U.S. EPA.3
- 19% of households are not served by public sewers and usually depend on septic tanks to treat and dispose of wastewater.4 Failing septic systems may contaminate surface and groundwater.4

Treatment of Municipal Wastewater
- An estimated 14,748 POTWs provide wastewater collection, treatment, and disposal service to more than 238 million people.6 Use of reclaimed water for consumption is becoming more common, particularly in regions prone to drought or with growing water demand (such as the U.S. southwest).7
- In 2015, California recycled roughly 714,000 acre-feet of water per year (ac-ft/yr). It has set ambitious goals to increase water recycling, with at least 1.5 million ac-ft/yr recycled by 2020, and 2.5 million ac-ft/yr by 2030.8
- POTWs generate over 13.8 million tons (dry weight) of sludge annually.9 Sludge requires significant energy to treat—about one-third of total electricity use by a wastewater treatment system.30
- In the U.S., chlorination is the most common mean of disinfection. Chlorination may be followed by dechlorination to avoid deteriorating ecological health of the receiving stream and the production of carcinogenic by-products.31
- Ultraviolet (UV) disinfection is an alternative to chlorination and has comparable energy consumption.32
- Chemical additions of ferric salts and lime enhance coagulation and sedimentation processes for improved solids removal as well as removal of toxic pollutants. However, their production and transport have life cycle impacts.33
- Classes of unregulated compounds known as “contaminants of emerging concern” (CECs) are a concern for water treatment engineers, particularly pharmaceuticals, personal care products, and perfluorinated compounds (PFCs).14 In the past decade, polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs), PFCs, and per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances have become CECs due to their wide distribution and persistence in the environment.40 Some of these chemicals are endocrine disruptors, a class of compounds that alter the normal functioning of endocrine systems, including those that affect growth, reproduction, and behavior.46 Many of these chemicals are not removed by POTWs.7

Biosolids (Sludge) End-of-Life
- Qualified biosolids can be beneficially used after “stabilization,” which kills pathogens and decomposes vector-attractive substances.8
- 54% of biosolids are beneficially used. Most is applied to agricultural sites, with minor amounts applied to forestry and reclamation sites (e.g., Superfund and brownfield lands) and urban area (e.g., maintaining park land).9
Life Cycle Impacts

Wastewater treatment systems reduce environmental impacts in the receiving water, but create other life cycle impacts, mainly through energy consumption. Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are associated with both the energy and chemicals used in wastewater treatment and the degradation of organic materials in the POTW.

Electricity Consumption and Emissions

• 2% of U.S. electricity use goes towards pumping and treating water and wastewater.20
• In 2013, energy-related emissions resulting from POTW operations, excluding organic sludge degradation, were 15.3 teragrams (Tg) CO₂-equivalents (CO₂e); 22.3 gigagrams (Gg) SO₂, and 12.7 Gg NOₓ. SO₂ and NOₓ contribute to acidification and eutrophication.20
• CH₄ and N₂O are emitted during organic sludge degradation by aerobic and anaerobic bacteria in the POTW and receiving water body. In 2018, an estimated 1.42 and 5.0 MMT CO₂e of CH₄ and N₂O, respectively, resulted from organic sludge degradation in wastewater treatment systems, about 0.3% of total U.S. GHG emissions.21

Social and Economic Impacts

• Population growth and urban sprawl increase the collection (sewer) infrastructure needed.
• Although the lifetime of a sewer system (50 years) is longer than that of treatment equipment (15 to 20 years), renovation needs of a sewer system can be more costly. If 600,000 miles of existing sewer systems are not renovated, the amount of deteriorated pipe will increase to 44% of the total network by 2020.20 In 2012, U.S. needs for building new and updating existing wastewater treatment plants, pipe repair and new pipes, and combined sewer overflow corrections were $102.0, $95.7, and $4.80 billion, respectively.8

Solutions and Sustainable Alternatives

Administrative Strategy

• Investment in wastewater treatment systems is shifting from new construction projects to maintenance of original capacity and function of facilities (asset management). Life cycle costing should be embedded in capital budgeting, and programs for combined sewer overflow, sanitary sewer overflow, and stormwater management need to be permanent.84
• In order to meet ambient water quality standards, total maximum daily loads (TMDLs) considering both point and non-point source pollutant loadings can be developed. Watershed-based management of clean water is expected to facilitate establishment of these TMDLs.25

Reduce Loading

• Examples of projects to reduce or divert wastewater flow include disconnecting household rainwater drainage from sanitary sewers, installing green roofs, and replacing impervious surfaces with porous pavement, swales, or French drains.
• Toilets, showers, and faucets represent 64% of all indoor water use. Install high-efficiency toilets, composting toilets, low-flow shower heads, faucet aerators, and rain barrels. A 2016 survey found that water-efficient appliances contributed to a 22% decline in household water use since 1999.26
• Graywater—wash water from kitchen sinks, tubs and showers, clothes washers, and laundry tubs—can be used for gardening, lawn maintenance, landscaping, and other uses.27

Technological Improvements and System Design

• The aeration process, which facilitates microbial degradation of organic matter, can account for 25% to 60% of the energy use in wastewater treatment plants. Flexible designs allow the system to meet oxygen demands as they fluctuate with time of day and season.26
• Pumping systems, typically consuming 10-45% of energy at wastewater treatment plants, can lead to inefficient energy consumption when pumps, flow control, and motors are mismatched to treatment plant needs.10
• A number of treatment plants are considering using methane generated from anaerobic digestion of biosolids as an energy resource.10
• Water reuse can significantly decrease system energy usage.30

Life Cycle Impact of Wastewater Treatment Systems

U.S. Cities

Large, densely populated, and bustling with activity, cities are cultural and economic centers, providing employment, leisure, and educational opportunities. Energy and resources flow in and out of cities to support their population and infrastructure. However, there is increasing attention on the environmental impacts of cities, and the significant opportunity for reducing the impact of the built environment and improving the livelihoods of urban residents.

Urban Land Use Patterns

- It is estimated that 83% of the U.S. population lives in urban areas, up from 64% in 1950. By 2050, 89% of the U.S. population and 68% of the world population is projected to live in urban areas.\(^1\)
- More than 300 urban areas in the U.S. have populations above 100,000; New York City, with 8.4 million inhabitants, is the largest.\(^3,4\)
- While the rate of urbanization, i.e., the changing of land from forest or agricultural uses to suburban and urban uses, is decreasing, an ever larger percentage of the world’s population is living in urban centers.\(^5\) Between 2000 and 2010, urban land area in the U.S. increased by 15%. Urban land area is 106,816 square miles, or 3% of total land area in the U.S., and is projected to more than double by 2060.\(^6,7\)
- The average population density of the U.S. is 90 people per square mile.\(^8\) The average population density of metropolitan statistical areas (MSA) is 283 people per square mile; in New York City, the population density is 27,012 people per square mile. Guttenberg, New Jersey has the greatest density of housing units (24,195) per square mile of land area.\(^6\)
- One study found that doubling population-weighted urban density reduces CO\(_2\) emissions from household travel and residential energy use by 48% and 35%, respectively.\(^9\)
- Sprawl, the spreading of a city and suburbs into surrounding rural land, increases traffic and energy use, and results in air and water pollution and flooding.\(^10\)
- According to Smart Growth America’s Sprawl Index (based on development density, land use mix, activity centering and street accessibility), the most sprawling metropolitan regions of the 221 surveyed are Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton, NC, Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta, GA, Clarksville, TN-KY, and Prescott, AZ. The least sprawling metropolitan areas include New York/White Plains/Wayne, NY-NJ, San Francisco/San Mateo/Redwood City, CA, Atlantic City/Hammonton, NJ, and Santa Barbara/Santa Maria/Goleta, CA.\(^11\)

Built and Natural Environment

- Residential (21.2 Quadrillion Btu; “quads”) and commercial (18.2 quads) sectors accounted for 39% of total energy consumption and 36% (1,907 million metric tons of CO\(_2\)) of energy-related emissions in 2018.\(^13\)
- The “urban heat island effect,” in which average annual temperatures are 1.8-5.4°F higher in cities than surrounding suburban and rural areas, results in increased energy demand, air pollution, GHG emissions, and heat-related illness, as well as decreased water quality.\(^14\)
- Urban tree canopies decrease the urban heat island effect. Target levels of canopy cover vary regionally and should be created for a specific city taking development densities, land use patterns, ordinances, and climate into account.\(^8\) Urban tree cover in the U.S. is 39.4% and has been declining, while impervious surfaces have expanded to 26.6% of urban areas.\(^7\)
- The Air Quality Index is an important environmental metric monitored in cities. Since 2000, emissions from key pollutants has decreased and, with it, the number of unhealthy air days for urban residents.\(^16\)
- Out of 315 contaminants detected in a national tap water quality study, 86 were sprawl- and urban-related pollutants resulting from road runoff, lawn pesticides, and human waste, of which 76 are unregulated.\(^17\)
- Vegetation and topsoil loss and the constructed drainage networks associated with urbanization alter natural hydrology.\(^18\)
- Stormwater runoff from the built environment is a principal contributor to water quality impairment of water bodies nationwide.\(^18\)
Transportation and Mobility

- In 2018, 55.79 billion passenger-miles (PM) were traveled on U.S. public transit and 3.2 trillion vehicle-miles were traveled (VMT) on U.S. public roads.1,2
- There are 23 light rail systems in the U.S. If current trends continue, fixed-guideway modes of public transit, such as light-rail and commuter rail, will soon have a greater share of passenger trips than roadway modes, such as buses.3 Without public transportation, the annual impacts in the U.S. would include an additional 102.2 billion VMT, 5.3 billion gallons of gas, and 37 million metric tons of CO₂ emissions.4
- Congestion is a serious problem in urban areas, causing an additional 8.8 billion hours of travel time and an extra 3.3 billion gallons of fuel use by urban Americans in 2017.5,6
- In 2016, transit buses used 91.6 trillion Btu and traveled 20.2 billion PM, while rail used 46.4 trillion Btu and traveled 39.1 billion PM. In comparison, passenger cars and trucks used 15,303 trillion Btu and traveled 4,406 billion PM.7,8
- By number of riders, New York City has the most utilized heavy rail, commuter rail, and bus systems in the U.S., Los Angeles has the most utilized light rail system, and San Francisco has the most utilized trolley bus system.9

Socioeconomic Patterns

- U.S. metro economies account for 91.1% of GDP, 91.8% of wage income, and 88.1% of jobs. Only 9 countries (including the U.S.) have a higher GDP than the New York City area.10
- The median household income inside MSAs is $66,164; outside MSAs it is $49,867.11 The average unemployment rate of metropolitan areas in March 2020 (pre-COVID-19) was 4.3%, ranging from a low of 2.1% in Honolulu, HI to a high of 20.5% in El Centro, CA.12
- Poverty rates are lower within metropolitan areas than outside: 11.3% compared to 14.7% in 2018.13

Solutions and Sustainable Alternatives

A sustainable urban area is characterized by the preservation of a quality environment, efficient use of renewable energy resources, the maintenance of a healthy population with access to health services, and the presence of economic vitality, social equity, and engaged citizenry.14 An integrated approach to environmental management, measures to counter sprawl, the establishment of linkages among community, ecology, and economy, and coordinated stakeholder interaction are necessary for achieving sustainability in cities.15

- The San Francisco-Oakland-Hayward metro region placed first on a United Nations’ Sustainability Development Goal (SDG) Index ranking based on 17 indicators across 15 of the 17 SDGs.16
- As of May 2020, 1,066 mayors have signed on to the 2005 U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, committing to reduce carbon emissions below 1990 levels, in line with the Kyoto Protocol.17
- A Living Cities Report found that over 75% of the 40 largest U.S. cities surveyed have plans for reducing GHG emissions in the coming years.18 Many cities, including New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, have created Climate Action Plans, demonstrating environmental leadership and commitment to reducing climate change.19
- The EPA offers many clean energy programs, information, training opportunities, grants, resources, and tools to assist local governments.
- ICLEI (International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives), an international association of local governments and national and regional local government organizations, develops locally designed initiatives to achieve sustainability objectives.20
- Smart Growth America is a coalition working to improve the planning and building of towns, cities, and metro areas.21
- The U.S. EPA’s Local Government Solar Project Portal provides guidance to local governments for community-wide deployment of solar power.22


September 2020

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3 U.S. Census Bureau (2019) “Incorporated Places of 50,000 or More.”
4 U.S. Census Bureau (2019) “Fastest Growing Cities Primarily in the South and West.”
29 ICLEI Global (2014) “Who is ICLEI.”
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Residential Buildings

Patterns of Use
Although climate-specific, resource-efficient house design strategies exist, per capita material use and energy consumption in the residential sector continue to increase. From 2000 to 2018, the U.S. population increased by 16.3%, while the number of housing units increased by 19.5%.

Between 2000 and 2010, urban land area increased by 15%.

The following trends demonstrate usage patterns in the residential building sector.

Size and Occupancy
- Increased average area of U.S. houses:
  1970s 1,767 ft²; 1990s 2,185 ft²; 2019 2,498 ft²
  41% increase from 1970
- Decreased average number of occupants in U.S. households:
  1970s 2.96; 1990s 2.64; 2019 2.52
  15% decrease from the 1970s
- Increased average area per person in U.S. houses:
  1970s 597 ft²; 1990s 828 ft²; 2019 991 ft²
  66% increase from the 1970s

Energy Use
- A University of Michigan study showed the average house in the U.S. consumed 147 kWh/m² annually in 2015.
- Electricity consumption increased 16-fold from 1950 to 2018. In 2017, the residential sector used 1.46 trillion kWh of electricity, 38.5% of U.S. total electricity sales.
- In 2019, the U.S. residential sector consumed 21.2 quadrillion Btu of primary energy, 21% of U.S. primary energy consumption.
- Miscellaneous plug loads per household doubled from 1976 to 2006. These are appliances and devices outside of a building’s core functions (HVAC, lighting, etc.) such as computers, fitness equipment, computers, TVs, and security systems.
- In 2019, miscellaneous loads consumed more electricity than any other residential end use (lighting, HVAC, water heating, and refrigeration), accounting for 37% of primary energy and 52% of electricity consumption.
- Wasteful energy uses include heating and cooling of unoccupied homes and rooms, inefficient appliances, thermostat oversetting, and standby power loss. Together, these uses account for at least 45% of the total energy use in the residential sector.
- Home energy management systems display energy use via in-home monitor or mobile application and enable remote control of devices. Home energy management systems can reduce a house’s energy use by an estimated 4-7%.

Material Use
- The average U.S. single-family house built in 2000 required 19 tons of concrete, 13,837 board-feet of lumber, and 3,061 ft² of insulation.
- From 1975 to 2000, the consumption of clay for housing and construction more than quadrupled, due to use in tiles and bathroom fixtures.
- In 2012, around 24% of all wood products consumed in the U.S. were used for residential construction.
- Approximately 10 million tons of waste was generated in the construction of new residential buildings in 2003—4.4 lbs per ft².
- U.S. average recycling rate of waste from construction and demolition (C&D) is 20-30%.

Codes and Standards
- DOE Pacific Northwest National Laboratory estimated cumulative savings from the International Energy Conservation Code (IECC) for 42 states. From 2010-2016, the IECC saved 0.27 quadrillion Btu of primary energy, 1.29% of residential primary energy consumption in 2019.
- For most building types, conventional energy efficiency technologies can achieve a 20% reduction in energy use relative to the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) 90.1-2004 standard.
- Florida’s 2007 energy code saved 13% relative to pre-2007 energy consumption through the reduction in heating, cooling, and hot water demand. Efficiency gains were offset by increasing house sizes and plug loads.
- The U.S. Green Building Council provides Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) home rating system and certification.
- Houses built to Energy Star program requirements are 20% more energy efficient than houses built to 2009 IECC or better.
- Energy retrofits, reduced in-home fuel use, and encouraging denser settlement could decrease residential greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.
Life Cycle Impacts

- Between 1990 and 2018, residential GHG emissions increased by 9%, reaching 1,042 million metric tons CO₂-equivalent.¹⁸
- In 1998, CSS conducted a life cycle energy consumption inventory of a 2,450 square foot, single-family house built in Ann Arbor, Michigan.²³
- Only 10% of the house’s life cycle energy consumption was attributed to construction and maintenance; 90% occurred during operation.²³
- Energy efficiency measures reduced life cycle energy consumption by 63%. Careful selection of materials reduced embodied energy by 4%.²³
- Life cycle GHG emissions were reduced from 1,013 to 374 metric tons CO₂-equivalent over the 50-year life of the house.²³
- Top contributors to primary energy consumption were polyamide for carpet, concrete, asphalt roofing shingles, and PVC for siding, window frames, and pipes. Improved HVAC system and cellulose insulation were the most effective strategies to reduce energy costs.²³
- Substituting recycled plastic/wood fiber shingles for asphalt shingle roofing reduced embodied energy by 98% over 50 years.²³
- A 900-f² house in Davis, CA, modeled design and technologies to reduce energy consumption, such as LED lighting, efficient appliances, graywater heat recovery, and a radiant heating and cooling system. Annual energy consumption fell to 5,834 kWh, 44% less than a standard house of the same size and location. Electricity generation from rooftop PV made the house energy net-positive.²⁴
- Operating energy accounts for 80–90% of a building’s life cycle energy consumption and embodied energy accounts for 10–20%. As energy efficiency improves and operating energy decreases, embodied energy accounts for a larger fraction of life cycle energy. Design and materials selection are key ways to reduce embodied energy.²⁵

Solutions and Sustainable Alternatives

Reduce Operational Energy Demand

Energy and water consumption during the life of a building contribute more to its environmental impact than do building materials. The following suggestions can significantly reduce operational energy demand:

- Downsizing: build smaller to reduce embodied and operating energy.²⁶ Tiny houses are designed for the efficient use of space.²⁰
- Space heating and cooling made up 43% of residential energy consumption in 2019.²⁷ Passive heating and cooling can reduce operating energy.²³
- By adding ceiling fans, air conditioning can be comfortably set about 4°F higher.²⁸
- Install low-flow water fixtures to save both water and energy.²⁰
- Adequate insulation can reduce heating and cooling costs. R-value needs differ based on location, building design, and heating methods.²⁰
- Water heating accounts for 14% of residential energy consumption.³³ Save energy with a graywater heat recovery system.⁴⁷
- Maximize natural lighting with south-facing windows. Properly shade windows to minimize summer heat gain.⁴⁸
- Purchase energy efficient appliances and lighting. Appliances and lighting typically account for 25% of household energy costs.⁴³
- Replace incandescent lamps and halogen lamps with compact fluorescent lamps or LEDs to reduce energy costs and GHG emissions.⁴⁴
- Seek guidance on pursuing net-zero carbon and/or energy certifications from organizations such as: International Living Future Institute, U.S. Green Building Council, and Passive House Institute U.S.⁴⁵

Select Durable and Renewable Materials

As operational energy is reduced, the embodied energy of building materials becomes more significant to long-term energy conservation and GHG emission reduction.⁴⁶ Durable building materials last longer and require fewer replacements than flimsier alternatives and can help decrease environmental burdens of residential buildings.

- Durables: cork or hardwood floors, metal roofing.
- Renewables: cork, linoleum, wool carpet, certified wood and plywood, strawboard, cellulose insulation, straw-bale.

5. U.S. Census Bureau (2020) Quarterly Statistics and Complementations by Purpose and Design.
7. U.S. Census Bureau (2019) Historical Household Tables.

Commercial Buildings

Commercial buildings include, but are not limited to, stores, offices, schools, places of worship, gymnasiums, libraries, museums, hospitals, clinics, warehouses, and jails. The design, construction, operation, and demolition of commercial buildings impact natural resources, environmental quality, worker productivity, and community well-being.

Patterns of Use
- In the U.S., 5.6 million commercial buildings contained 87 billion square feet of floor space in 2012—an increase of 46% in number of buildings and 71% in floor space since 1979.
- By 2050, commercial building floor space is expected to reach 124.7 billion square feet, a 34% increase from 2019.
- Education, mercantile, office, and warehouse/storage buildings make up 60% of total commercial floor space and 50% of buildings.

Resource Consumption

Energy Use
- Commercial buildings consumed 18% of all energy in the U.S. in 2019.
- In 2019, the commercial sector consumed 18.18 quadrillion Btu of primary energy, a 72% increase from 1980.
- Operational energy represents 80-90% of a building’s life cycle energy consumption. In under 2.5 years of operation, a UM campus building with an estimated lifespan of 75 years consumed more energy than material production and construction combined.

Material Use
- Typical buildings contain materials including concrete, metals, drywall, and asphalt. To make concrete, cement (a combination of ground minerals) is mixed with sand, water, gravel, and other materials. Structural steel made up 46% of the structural building material market share, followed by concrete in 2017. While strong and durable, both concrete and steel require significant energy to create and have higher embodied emissions than other materials.
- In 2011, the construction of new low-rise non-residential buildings in the U.S. consumed about 627 million board feet of lumber, accounting for approximately 1% of all lumber consumed in the U.S.

Water Consumption
- In 2005, commercial buildings used an estimated 10.2 billion gallons of water per day, an increase of 23% from 1990 levels.
- Domestic/restroom water is the largest end use in commercial buildings, except in restaurants where 52% of the water is used for dishwashing or kitchen use.

Life Cycle Impacts

Construction and Demolition Waste
- In 2017, 569 million tons of construction and demolition (C&D) waste was generated. This amounted to approximately 9.6 lbs per capita daily compared to the U.S. average of 4.5 lbs per capita per day of municipal solid waste.
- Approximately 38% of C&D building waste was recovered for processing and recycling in 2014. Most frequently recovered and recycled were concrete, asphalt, metals, and wood.

Indoor Air Quality
- Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) are found in concentrations 2 to 5 times greater indoors than in nature. Exposure to high concentrations of VOCs can result in eye, nose, and throat irritation; headaches and nausea; and extreme effects, such as cancer or nervous system damage. VOCs are emitted from adhesives, paints, solvents, aerosol sprays, and disinfectants.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- The combustion of fossil fuels to provide energy to commercial buildings emitted 826 million metric tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in 2019, approximately 16% of all U.S. CO₂ emissions that year.
- As operational emissions drop with the adoption of energy efficiency and renewable energy, embodied emissions, those which are attributed to the building materials and energy required for construction, will likely dominate new building life cycle emissions by 2050.
Solutions and Sustainable Alternatives

Opportunities

- Before 2000, little attention was paid to energy use and environmental impact of buildings during design and construction. In 2013, an estimated 72% of buildings were more than 20 years old.\textsuperscript{6} For typical commercial buildings, energy efficiency measures can reduce energy consumption by 20-30% with no significant design alterations.\textsuperscript{5}
- NREL found that 62% of office buildings, or 47% of commercial floor space, can reach net-zero energy use by implementing current energy efficiency technologies and self-generation (solar PV). By redesigning all buildings to comply with current standards, implementing current energy efficiency measures, and outfitting buildings with solar PV, average energy use intensity can be reduced from 1020 to 139 MJ/m\textsuperscript{2}-yr, an 86% reduction in energy use intensity.\textsuperscript{20}
- Energy Star’s Portfolio Manager tracks energy and water consumption.\textsuperscript{21} The tool includes over 300,000 commercial buildings, and could serve as a national database to benchmark building performance and provide transparency to building managers and tenants.\textsuperscript{22}
- Erosion and pollution from stormwater runoff can be mitigated by using porous materials for paved surfaces and native vegetation instead of high maintenance grass lawns. A typical city block generates more than 5 times the runoff than a woodland area of equal size.\textsuperscript{23}

Design Guidelines and Rating Systems

- The U.S. Green Buildings Council developed the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system. LEED is a tool for building performance, assigning points for design attributes that reduce environmental burdens and promote healthy, sustainable buildings.\textsuperscript{24}
- Passive House Institute US provides a climate-specific building standard to minimize energy use and emissions. There are 5 principles of passive building, mainly focused on insulation and airtightness,\textsuperscript{25,26}
- The U.S. EPA Energy Star buildings program recognizes and assists organizations that have committed to energy efficiency improvement.\textsuperscript{27}
- The Living Building Challenge, an initiative by the International Living Future Institute, comprises seven performance areas, or ‘petals’: place, water, health and happiness, energy, materials, equity, and beauty.\textsuperscript{28}

Case Studies

- The Samuel Trask Dana Building, a 100-year-old structure located on UM’s Ann Arbor campus, was renovated in 2004 to improve energy and environmental performance. Design features include photovoltaic electricity generation, natural lighting, radiant cooling, composting restrooms, and selective materials use and reuse. The renovation attained a LEED Gold rating.\textsuperscript{29}
- The Center for Sustainable Landscapes (CSL) was recognized by the American Institute of Architects in its 2016 Commitment to the Environment Top Ten Projects,\textsuperscript{30} and was the first building to meet the Living Building Challenge, LEED Platinum, SITES Platinum, WELL Building Platinum, and BREEAM Outstanding In-Use green certifications.\textsuperscript{29}
- CSL is a net-zero energy building, which significantly reduces its environmental impact during use, but a study revealed its materials had near equal embodied energy and 10% higher global warming potential than a conventional building. As operational efficiencies continue to decrease the impact of a building’s use phase, greater attention will be needed to address embodied energy requirements in the resource extraction and construction phases.\textsuperscript{31}
- The Tashjian Bee and Pollinator Discovery Center in Chaska, MN was an AIA COTE 2019 Top Ten Award winner. This facility achieved a 51% reduction in operating costs, a 71% reduction in energy consumption, and uses native vegetation to support local and migratory wildlife.\textsuperscript{24}
- There is a movement to make the energy and water use of buildings more transparent to both building owners and tenants. For example, New York City passed Local Laws 84 (2009) and 113 (2016) requiring large building owners to report energy and water through the EPA’s Energy Star Portfolio Manager. The information is analyzed by the New York City government and is also available to the public.\textsuperscript{25}

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34. American Institute of Architects (2019) Tashjian Bee and Pollinator Discovery Center.
35. New York City, Mayor’s Office of Sustainability (2020) “About LL84.”
Green Information Technologies (Green IT) reduce the environmental impacts associated with conventional Information Technologies (IT). Examples of Green IT include energy efficient hardware and data centers, server virtualization, and monitoring systems. Green IT focuses on mitigating the material and energy burdens associated with conventional IT while meeting our information and communication demands.¹

Patterns of Use
- 2.16 billion mobile phones, tablets, and PCs were shipped in 2017.³
- Globally, more people have mobile phones than access to safe sanitation.⁴,⁵
- 139 million smartphones were sold globally in 2008. Over 1.5 billion were sold in 2018.⁶
- In 2016, 89% of households in the U.S. had a computer at home, compared to 8% in 1984. Of all households in 2016, 77% had a desktop or laptop, 76% had a smartphone, 58% had a tablet, and 81% had a broadband internet connection.⁷
- More than 1.4% of households used their primary computer for 10+ hours per day in 2009.⁸
- Computers and office equipment consumed 253 billion kWh of electricity in 2012, 24% of the total electricity consumption of office buildings that year.⁹
- In 2014, U.S. data centers consumed 70 billion kWh of electricity—4.8% of total electricity consumption.⁹
- The peak power associated with servers and data centers in 2007 was 7 GW. Existing technologies and efficient design strategies can reduce server energy use by 25% or more, while best management practices and consolidating servers can reduce energy use by 20%.¹⁰

Energy and Environmental Impact
- Electricity used for U.S. servers and data centers creates 35.9 million metric tons CO₂eq annually.¹¹,¹²
- Computer electricity consumption varies greatly with age, hardware, and user habits. An average desktop computer requires 66 W when idle and 1.9 W in sleep mode. Laptops require less power on average—33 W when idle and 1.0 W in sleep mode.¹³
- A 17” light emitting diode (LED) LCD monitor uses about 13 W while on, 0.4 W in standby, and about 0.3 W when off.¹⁴
- Every kWh used by office equipment requires an additional 0.2-0.5 kWh for air conditioning.¹⁵
- The life cycle energy burden of a typical computer used for 3 years is 4,222 kWh. Only 34% of a computer’s life cycle energy consumption occurs in the 3-year use phase. Production dominates life cycle energy due to the high energy costs of semiconductors and short use phase.¹⁶
- Manufacturing represents 60-85% of life cycle energy demand for a personal computer and 50-60% for mobile phones. Remanufacturing energy is a fraction of manufacturing energy: 5-30% for personal computers and 5% for mobile phones.¹⁷
- Some emerging technologies can reduce manufacturing burdens. Globally, 3D printing has the potential to reduce total primary energy use by 2.5-9.3 EJ and CO₂ emissions by 131-526 Mt by 2025.¹⁸

Electronic Waste
- In 2019, approximately 54 million metric tons of e-waste were generated worldwide and only 17% was recycled properly.¹⁹
- U.S. federal regulations currently allow the export of e-waste, posing a global threat to human health.²⁰,²¹ An estimated 5-30% of the 40 million computers used in the U.S. were exported to developing countries in 2010.²² In 2016, Basel Action Network found that 34% of the e-waste tracked by GPS trackers in the U.S. moved off shore, almost all to developing countries.²³
- In 2010, the U.S. disposed of 82 million computers and 152 million mobile devices, 40% of computers and 11% of mobile devices are recycled.²⁴
- The main constituents of printed circuit boards used in mobile electronics are polymers and copper, with trace amounts of precious metals Ag, Au, and Pd, and toxic metals As, Be, Cr, and Pb.²⁵
- One ton of printed circuit boards has a higher concentration of precious metals than one ton of mined ore.²⁶

Paper Industry
- After slow growth from 2014 to 2017, paper production decreased by 2% globally in 2018, and decreased by 3% in North America.²⁷ Annual consumption of printing and writing paper is expected to rise from 109 to 274 million metric tons between 2006 and 2060.²⁸
- The U.S. accounts for approximately 18% of global printing and writing paper consumption.²⁹
- Depending on the process, producing one ton of paper consumes 12 to 24 trees.³⁰
- In 2018, greenhouse gas emissions of the U.S. pulp and paper manufacturing industry were 35.7 million metric tons CO₂eq, approximately equivalent to the annual carbon sequestered by 47 million acres of U.S. forests.³¹,³²

[Image 413x505 to 583x616]
Sustainable Alternatives

Technology

- Virtualization enables one physical server to run many independent programs and/or operating systems. This technology reduces the number of physical servers needed and promotes greater utilization of each server. With virtualization, each machine can run at 80% capacity rather than 10%. Virtualization reduces cost, material waste, electricity use, server sprawl, and cooling loads, saving money while reducing the environmental burdens of running a data center.
- Data center energy efficiency can be improved by utilizing combined heat and power systems. Heat recovered from electricity generation in the form of steam or hot water can be used by an on-site chiller to cool the data center.
- Multi-function office equipment can reduce energy consumption and waste. To save money and energy, Energy Star recommends choosing a machine that combines multiple functions, like printing and scanning, instead of purchasing two different machines.
- Telecommuting or working from home, in which employees work remotely, is becoming more common. Studies suggest energy savings as a result of decreased commuting transportation. When examining the broader energy system impacts, however, increased energy use at home for IT, lighting, and heating/cooling may offset the transportation energy savings.

Reduce Energy Consumption

- Office equipment energy consumption could be reduced by 23% if all office equipment had and utilized low-power mode. If all desktop computers and printers were turned off for the night, energy consumption would be further reduced by 9%. If every PC in the world were shut off for one night, the energy saved could light the Empire State Building for over 30 years.
- Energy Star certified computer servers are, on average, 30% more energy efficient than standard servers. If all servers in the U.S. met Energy Star standards, $1 billion in energy would be saved and 8.2 million metric tons of GHG emissions would be avoided per year.
- Energy consumed by devices in standby mode accounts for ≤10% of residential energy use, adding up to $100 per year for the average American household. Unplug electronic devices when not in use, or plug them into a power strip and turn that off.
- Turning off a computer when it is not in use can save $50, 500 kWh, and 481 lbs of CO₂ per computer annually.
- When leaving computers on, EPA recommends setting computer monitors to go to sleep after 5-20 minutes of inactivity, and for desktop computers to enter standby after 30-60 minutes.

Take Action

- The Green Electronics Council’s Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool (EPEAT) rates and verifies the environmental impacts of computer products across multiple criteria, including energy efficiency, material toxicity, and recyclability.
- Purchase Energy Star certified products, consolidate multiple devices into all-in-one equipment, and turn off devices when not in use.
- The average American generates 412 pounds of paper waste each year, and 45% of printed paper in offices is discarded by the end of the day. Save resources by not printing or, when a paper version is necessary, by printing double-sided on recycled paper.
- Extend the life of personal computers to delay the energy and materials burdens associated with making new equipment.
- Maximize the life of batteries with these practices: minimize exposure to extreme hot and cold temperatures and time spent at both 0% and 100% charge; avoid fast charging, discharging faster than required, use in high moisture environments, and mechanical damage; and follow manufacturer calibration instructions.
- Recycle your unused electronics. Responsible Recycling (R2) and e-Stewards offer third-party certification for electronics recyclers to ensure the proper disposal of used electronics.

Personal Transportation

In the U.S., the predominant mode of travel is by automobile and light truck, accounting for about 87% of passenger miles traveled in 2018. The U.S. has less than 5% of the world’s population, but has 12% of the world’s cars, compared to 18.2% in China, 6.1% in Japan, 4.6% in Germany, and 4.6% in Russia. The countries with the most growth in registered cars since 1990 are China, India, and Indonesia, with average change of 18.5%, 10.7%, and 9.6%, respectively. The transportation consumption patterns that follow indicate that the current system is unsustainable.

Patterns of Use

Miles Traveled

- Total U.S. passenger miles traveled in 2018 were 5.6 trillion.
- U.S. population increased 32% from 1990 to 2020. Vehicle miles traveled (VMT) increased 51% over the same time period.
- 70% of the total annual vehicle miles traveled in the U.S. occur in urban areas.

Vehicles and Occupancy

- In 1977, the U.S. average vehicle occupancy was 1.87 persons per vehicle.
- In 2017, average car occupancy was 1.5 persons per vehicle.
- In 2018, the U.S. had 274 million registered vehicles and 228 million licensed drivers.
- In 2017, 24% of U.S. households had three or more vehicles.

Average Fuel Economy

- The average vehicle fleet fuel economy peaked at 22.0 miles per gallon (mpg) in 1987, declined until the early 2000s, then increased again surpassing 22.0 mpg in 2009.
- The average fuel economy for a 2018 model year vehicle was 25.1 mpg: 30.0 mpg for a new passenger car (sedan/wagon and car SUV) and 22.0 mpg for a new truck (truck SUV, minivan/van, and pickup).
- Given the legislation in place, the U.S. has some of the lowest fuel economy standards of any industrialized nation, well below the European Union, China, and Japan.

Vehicle Size

- From 1988 to 2018, average vehicle weight increased 26% (due to SUV market share growth), horsepower increased by 96%, and acceleration increased (i.e., 0-60 mph times dropped) by 40%.
- During the same period, the average weight of a passenger car increased 17%, while the average weight of a pickup truck increased by 21%.
- SUVs, vans, and pickups accounted for 52% of new vehicles sold in the U.S. in 2018.

Energy Use

- The transportation sector makes up 28% of total U.S. energy use. Since 1990, the energy use in the transportation sector grew by 26%, though the share of U.S. energy used for transportation increased by less than 2 percent.
- In 2017, American cars and light trucks used 15.3 Quadrillion Btus of energy, representing 16% of total U.S. energy consumption.
- In 2019, 95% of total primary energy used for transportation came from fossil fuels; 92% of total primary energy was from petroleum.
- The transportation sector accounted for 28% of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions in 2018—1,883 million metric tons CO₂e.
- In 2018, passenger cars and light-duty trucks were responsible for 778 million metric tons CO₂e and 328 million metric tons CO₂e, respectively, together making up 59% of U.S. transportation emissions and 17% of total U.S. emissions.
Life Cycle Impacts
A typical passenger car is responsible for various burdens during its lifetime (raw material extraction through end-of-life). Most of these impacts are due to fuel production and vehicle operations. Vehicle lifetime energy use for fuel production and vehicle operations is 1.22 and 4.54 MJ/mi, respectively, while energy use for material production, manufacturing, maintenance, and end-of-life combined is only 0.56 MJ/mi.¹⁹

Solutions and Sustainable Alternatives
Reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled
• Live closer to work. Driving to/from work represents 30% of vehicle miles driven, and the average commute is 12 miles.² Consider telecommuting or working from home.
• In 2018, 76.4% of workers in the U.S. commuted by driving alone, and only 9.1% of workers carpooled (a drop from 19.7% in 1980).³ Joining a carpool can help lower household fuel costs, prevent GHG emissions, and reduce traffic congestion.
• Roughly one-fifth of vehicle trips are shopping-related. Combine errands (trip chaining) to avoid unnecessary driving.³
• In 2017, traffic congestion caused Americans to spend an extra 8.8 billion hours on roads and buy an additional 3.1 billion gallons of gas. Using alternative modes of transportation, such as bikes, buses, or trains can reduce GHG emissions and decrease wasted time and money.²⁰

Promote Fuel Efficiency
• Consider buying a vehicle that is best-in-class for fuel economy. Each year, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Energy jointly publish the Fuel Economy Guide, which ranks the most efficient vehicles in production.⁷³
• Drive responsibly. Aggressive driving habits can lower fuel efficiency by 10% to 40%, and speeds over 50 mph significantly lower gas mileage.⁷⁴
• Gallons per mile (gpm) is a better indicator of fuel efficiency than mpg. For example, upgrading from a 16 mpg to 20 mpg vehicle saves 135 gallons of fuel over 10,000 miles, whereas upgrading from a 14 to 10 mpg vehicle saves 94 gallons over 10,000 miles.⁷⁵
• Improvements in information technology related to vehicles such as automation and platooning will likely reduce energy wasted from drivers stuck in traffic.²⁶

Encourage Supportive Public Policy
• Dense, mixed-use communities encourage foot and bike travel while reducing time between residences, businesses, and office spaces.
• In 2010, the U.S. EPA and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) set Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards that were set to raise fuel economy to 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025, saving billions of dollars in gas and avoiding millions of metric tons of CO₂ emissions.⁷⁹ In 2020, CAFE standards were replaced with lower targets in the Safer Affordable Fuel-Efficient (SAFE) rule. SAFE rules require vehicle manufacturers’ new passenger car and light-duty truck fleets to increase efficiency by 1.5% annually, reaching 201 g/mi CO₂ and 40.5 mpg by 2030.⁷⁷
• Some believe that fuel economy standards tied to vehicle size could incentivize a market shift toward larger vehicles, a trend we see currently. A University of Michigan study predicted vehicle footprint increases of 2-32%, which could undermine the progress made in fuel economy by 1-4 mpg.²⁰


Autonomous Vehicles

Autonomous vehicles (AVs) use technology to partially or entirely replace the human driver in navigating a vehicle from an origin to a destination while avoiding road hazards and responding to traffic conditions. The Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) has developed a widely-adopted classification system with six levels based on the level of human intervention. The U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) uses this classification system.

Levels of Automation

The SAE AV classification system is broken down by level of automation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Vehicles equipped with no automated features, requiring the driver to be in complete control of the vehicle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Vehicles equipped with one or more primary automated features such as cruise control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Vehicles equipped with two or more primary features, such as adaptive cruise control and lane-keeping, that work together to relieve the driver from controlling those functions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Vehicles equipped with features that allow the driver to relinquish control of the vehicle’s safety-critical functions depending on traffic and environmental conditions. The driver is expected to take over control of the vehicle given the constraints of the automated features after an appropriately timed transition period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Vehicles equipped with features that allow the driver to relinquish control of the vehicle’s safety-critical functions. The vehicle can perform all aspects of driving even if the driver does not respond to a request to intervene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fully autonomous vehicles that monitor roadway conditions and perform safety-critical tasks throughout the duration of the trip with or without a driver present. This level of automation is appropriate for occupied and unoccupied trips.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Development of Autonomous Vehicles

AV research started in the 1980s when universities began working on two types of AVs: one that required roadway infrastructure and one that did not. The U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) has held “grand challenges” testing the performance of AVs on a 150-mile off-road course. No vehicles successfully finished the 2004 Grand Challenge, but five completed the course in 2005. In 2007, six teams finished the third DARPA challenge, which consisted of a 60-mile course navigating an urban environment obeying normal traffic laws. In 2015, the University of Michigan built MCity, the first testing facility built for autonomous vehicles. Research is conducted there into the safety, efficiency, accessibility, and commercial viability of AVs. Unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), or drones, are being developed and automated for commercial ventures such as last-mile package delivery, medical supply transportation, and inspection of critical infrastructure.

Autonomous Vehicle Technologies

AVs use combinations of technologies and sensors to sense the roadway, other vehicles, and objects on and along the roadway.

Current and Projected Market

Market Leaders

- Waymo has tested its vehicles by driving over 20 million miles on public roads and tens of billions of miles in simulation.
- Tesla has accumulated over 3 billion miles in Autopilot mode since 2014.
- Other major contributors include Audi, BMW, Daimler, GM, Nissan, Volvo, Bosch, Continental, Mobileye, Valeo, Velodyne, Nvidia, Ford, as well as many other OEMs and technology companies.

Regulations, Liability, and Projected Timeline

- Regulation will directly impact the adoption of AVs. There are no national standards or guidelines for AVs, allowing states to determine their own. In 2018, Congress worked to pass the AV Start Act that would have implemented a framework for the testing, regulating, and deploying of AVs. The legislation failed to pass both houses. As of February 2020, 29 states and D.C. have enacted legislation regarding the definition of AVs, their usage, and liability, among other topics.
- Product liability laws need to assign liability properly when AV crashes occur, as highlighted by the May 2016 Tesla Model S fatality. Liability will depend on multiple factors, especially whether the vehicle was being operated appropriately to its level of automation.
- Although many researchers, OEMs, and industry experts have different projected timelines for AV market penetration and full adoption, the majority predict Level 5 AVs around 2030.
Current Limitations and Barriers

- There are several limitations and barriers that could impede adoption of AVs, including: the need for sufficient consumer demand, assurance of data security, protection against cyberattacks, regulations compatible with driverless operation, resolved liability laws, societal attitude and behavior change regarding distrust and subsequent resistance to AV use, and the development of economically viable AV technologies.  
- Weather can adversely affect sensor performance on AVs, potentially impeding adoption. Ford recognized this barrier and started conducting AV testing in the snow in 2016 at the University of Michigan’s Mcity testing facility, utilizing technologies suited for poor weather conditions.  

Impacts, Solutions, and Sustainability

Although AVs alone are unlikely to have significant direct impacts on energy consumption and GHG emissions, when AVs are effectively paired with other technologies and new transportation models, significant indirect and synergistic effects on economics, the environment, and society are possible. One study found that when eco-driving, platooning, intersection connectivity and faster highway speeds are considered as direct effects of connected and automated vehicles, energy use and GHG emissions can be reduced by 9%.  

Metrics and Associated Impacts

- **Congestion**: Congestion is predicted to decrease, reducing fuel consumption by 0-4%. However, decreased congestion is likely to lead to increased vehicle-miles traveled (VMT), limiting the fuel consumption benefit.  
- **Eco-Driving**: Eco-Driving, practices that typically reduce fuel consumption, is predicted to reduce energy consumption by up to 20%. However, if AV algorithms do not prioritize efficiency, fuel efficiency may actually decrease.  
- **Platooning**: Platooning, a train of detached vehicles that collectively travel closely together, is expected to reduce energy consumption between 3-35% depending on the number of vehicles, their separation, and vehicle characteristics.  
- **De-emphasized Performance**: Vehicle performance, such as fast acceleration, is likely to become de-emphasized when comfort and productivity become travel priorities, potentially leading to a 5-23% reduction in fuel consumption.  
- **Improved Crash Avoidance**: Due to the increased safety features of AVs, crashes are less likely to occur, allowing for the reduction of vehicle weight and size, decreasing fuel consumption between 5-23%.  
- **Vehicle Right-Sizing**: The ability to match the utility of a vehicle to a given need. Vehicle right-sizing has the potential to decrease energy consumption between 21-45%, though the full benefits are only likely when paired with a ride-sharing on-demand model.  
- **Higher Highway Speeds**: Increased highway speeds are likely due to improved safety, increasing fuel consumption by 7-30%.  
- **Travel Cost Reduction**: AVs are predicted to reduce the cost of traveling due to decreased insurance cost and cost of time due to improvements in productivity and driving comfort. These benefits could result in increased travel potentially increasing energy consumption by 4% to 60%.  
- **New User Groups**: AVs are likely to increase VMT, especially for elderly and disabled users, and fuel consumption from new users by 2-10%.  
- **Changed Mobility Services**: Ride-sharing on-demand business models are likely to utilize AVs due to the significant reduction of labor costs. The adoption of a ride-sharing model is estimated to reduce energy consumption by 0-20%.  
- **Although an accurate assessment of these interconnected impacts cannot currently be made, one study evaluated the potential impacts of four scenarios, each with unknown likelihoods. The most optimistic scenario projected a 40% decrease in total road transport energy and the most pessimistic scenario projected a 105% increase in total road transport energy.**

Potential Benefits and Costs

- **In 2018, U.S. annual vehicular fatality rate was 36,660; 94% of crashes are due to human error. AVs have the potential to remove/reduce human error and decrease deaths.** AVs have the potential to reduce crashes by 90%, potentially saving approximately $190 billion per year.  
- **Potential benefits include improvements in safety and public health; increased productivity, quality of life, mobility, accessibility, and travel, especially for the disabled and elderly; reduction of energy use, environmental impacts, congestion, and public and private costs associated with transportation; and increased adoption of car sharing.**  
- **Potential costs include increased congestion, VMT, urban sprawl, total time spent traveling, and upfront costs of private car ownership leading to social equity issues; usage impact on other modes of transportation; and increased concern with security, safety, and public health.**  

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5. Federal Aviation Administration (2020) Fact Sheet - The UAS Integration Pilot Program.  
7. Adapted from The Economist (2013) How does a self-driving car work?  
Greenhouse Gases

The Greenhouse Effect
The greenhouse effect is a natural phenomenon that insulates the Earth from the cold of space. As incoming solar radiation is absorbed and re-emitted back from the Earth’s surface as infrared energy, greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere prevent some of this heat from escaping into space, instead reflecting the energy back to further warm the surface. Anthropogenic (human-caused) GHG emissions are modifying the Earth’s energy balance between incoming solar radiation and the heat released back into space, amplifying the greenhouse effect and resulting in climate change.

Greenhouse Gases
- There are ten primary GHGs; of these, water vapor (H₂O), carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), and nitrous oxide (N₂O) are naturally occurring. Perfluorocarbons (CF₃, C₂F₆), hydrofluorocarbons (CHF₃, CF₂, CHF, CH₂CHF), and sulfur hexafluoride (SF₆) are only present in the atmosphere due to industrial processes.
- Water vapor is the most abundant and dominant GHG in the atmosphere. Its concentration depends on temperature and other meteorological conditions and not directly upon human activities.
- CO₂ is the primary anthropogenic greenhouse gas, accounting for 78% of the human contribution to the greenhouse effect in 2010.
- Global Warming Potentials (GWPs) indicate the relative effectiveness of GHGs in trapping the Earth’s heat over a certain time horizon. CO₂ is used as the reference gas and has a GWP of one. For example, the 100-year GWP of SF₆ is 23,500, indicating that its radiative effect on a mass basis is 23,500 times that of CO₂ over the same time horizon.
- GHG emissions are typically discussed in terms of mass of carbon dioxide equivalents (CO₂e), which are calculated by multiplying the mass of emissions by the GWP of the gas.

Atmospheric Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Since 1750, atmospheric concentrations of CO₂, CH₄, and N₂O increased by 147%, 259%, and 123%, respectively, to levels that are unprecedented in the past 800,000 years.
- Before the Industrial Revolution, the concentration of CO₂ remained around 280 parts per million (ppm) by volume. In March 2020, the global monthly average concentration increased to 413.67 ppm, which is about 3 ppm higher than in 2019.

Sources of Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Anthropogenic CO₂ is emitted primarily from fossil fuel combustion. Iron and steel production, petrochemical production, and cement production are other significant sources of CO₂ emissions.
- The U.S. oil and gas industry emits 2.3% of its gross gas production annually, equivalent to 13 million metric tons of methane—nearly 60 percent higher than the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates.
- CH₄ and N₂O are emitted from both natural and anthropogenic sources. Domestic livestock, landfills, and natural gas systems are the primary anthropogenic sources of CH₄. Agricultural soil management (fertilizer) contributes 78% of anthropogenic N₂O. Other significant sources include mobile and stationary combustion and livestock.
- Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) are the fastest growing category of GHG (increasing annually at a rate of 10-15%) and are used in refrigeration, cooling, and as solvents in place of ozone-depleting chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).

Emissions and Trends
Global
- In 2018, total global anthropogenic GHG emissions were 51.8 Gt CO₂e. Since 1990, annual anthropogenic GHG emissions increased by 57%.
- GHG emissions increased by 1.0 Gt CO₂e in 2018. For comparison, emissions averaged an increase of 0.4 Gt CO₂e per year from 1970-2000.
- Emissions from fossil fuel combustion account for a majority (72%) of global anthropogenic GHG emissions. In 2017, global emissions of CO₂ from energy use totaled 35.5 Gt CO₂.
- From 2000 to 2017, global CO₂ emissions from energy use increased 45%.
- Since 2005, China has been the world’s largest source of anthropogenic CO₂ emissions, surpassing the U.S.
United States

- The U.S. represents less than 5% of the world’s total population, but was responsible for 15% of total anthropogenic GHG emissions in 2018.\textsuperscript{13,12} 
- GHG emission in 2018 were 3.7% higher than in 1990, with an average annual growth rate of 0.2%.\textsuperscript{5} 
- Fossil fuel combustion is the largest source of U.S. GHGs, currently accounting for 75% of total emissions. Since 1990, fossil fuel consumption has grown at a rate of 0.2%. However, both GHG emissions and fossil fuel consumption have decreased since 2005 while GDP kept growing.\textsuperscript{5} 
- CO\textsubscript{2} emissions accounted for 81% of total U.S. GWP-weighted emissions (CO\textsubscript{2}e) in 2018 and were 6% higher than in 1990.\textsuperscript{5} 
- The power electric industry produces 27% of total U.S. GHG emissions. Emissions from this sector have decreased 4% since 1990.\textsuperscript{5} 
- Transportation is the largest contributor of U.S. GHG emissions, responsible for 28% of total emissions in 2018, (23% higher than in 1990). Passenger cars and light-duty trucks accounted for 777 and 328 million metric tons CO\textsubscript{2}e, respectively, together making up 99% of U.S. transportation emissions and 17% of total U.S. emissions.\textsuperscript{5} 
- Urban sprawl, increased travel demand, population growth, and low fuel prices drive the growth of transportation GHG emissions.\textsuperscript{5} 
- Land use and forestry in the U.S. sequester a portion of CO\textsubscript{2} in growing plants and trees, removing 11-12% of the GHGs emitted by the U.S. in 2018.\textsuperscript{5} 
- As a result of 2008 federal legislation, sources that emit over 25,000 metric tons CO\textsubscript{2}e in the U.S. are required to report emissions to the U.S. EPA.\textsuperscript{54} 

Emissions by Activity

- Use of a 100W light bulb for 10 hours: 1.00 lbs CO\textsubscript{2}e\textsuperscript{15} 
- 1 mile driven in a car (30.0 mpg): 0.65 lbs CO\textsubscript{2}e\textsuperscript{16} 
- 1 mile driven in a light-duty vehicle (22.0 mpg): 0.90 lbs CO\textsubscript{2}e\textsuperscript{16} 

Future Scenarios and Targets

- Stabilizing global temperatures and limiting the effects of climate change require more than just slowing the growth rate of emissions; they require absolute emissions reduction to net-zero or net-negative levels.\textsuperscript{77} 
- Based on current trends, global energy-related CO\textsubscript{2} emissions are anticipated to increase by 22% from 2018 to 2050.\textsuperscript{18} 
- Non-OECD countries’ CO\textsubscript{2} emissions are expected to increase by 1.0% annually, while OECD countries’ emissions decline by 0.2% annually. Despite this difference, OECD countries will still have per capita emissions 2.2 times higher than non-OECD countries in 2050.\textsuperscript{18} 
- Under the Kyoto Protocol, developed countries agreed to reduce their GHG emissions on average by 5% below 1990 levels by 2012. When the first commitment period ended, the Protocol was amended for a second commitment period with a new overall reduction goal of 18% below 1990 levels by 2020.\textsuperscript{70} 
- In 2015, UNFCCC parties came to an agreement in Paris with a goal to limit global temperature rise to less than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, in order to avoid the worst effects of climate change.\textsuperscript{29} 
- Global CO\textsubscript{2} emissions would need to decline 45% from 2010 levels by 2030 and reach net-zero by around 2050 to avoid temperature rise beyond 1.5°C.\textsuperscript{77} 

1 Teragram (Tg) = 1000 Giga grams (Gg) = 1 million metric tons = 0.001 Giga tons (Gt) = 2.2 billion pounds (lbs)
Climate Change: Science and Impacts

The Earth’s Climate
Climate change is altering temperature, precipitation, and sea levels, and will adversely impact human and natural systems, including water resources, human settlements and health, ecosystems, and biodiversity. The unprecedented acceleration of climate change over the last 50 years and the increasing confidence in global climate models add to the compelling evidence that climate is being affected by greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from human activities.

Changes in climate should not be confused with changes in weather. Weather is observed at a particular location on a time scale of hours or days, and exhibits a high degree of variability, whereas climate is the long-term average of short-term weather patterns, such as the annual average temperature or rainfall. Under a stable climate, there is an energy balance between incoming short wave solar radiation and outgoing long wave infrared radiation. Solar radiation passes through the atmosphere and most is absorbed by the Earth’s surface. The surface then re-emits energy as infrared radiation, a portion of which escapes into space. Increases in the concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere reduce the amount of energy the Earth’s surface radiates to space, thus warming the planet.

Climate Forcings
- Disturbances of the Earth’s balance of incoming and outgoing energy are referred to as positive or negative climate forcings. Positive forcings, such as GHGs, exert a warming influence on the Earth, while negative forcings, such as sulfate aerosols, exert a cooling influence.
- Increased concentrations of GHGs from anthropogenic sources have increased the absorption of infrared radiation, enhancing the natural greenhouse effect. Methane and other GHGs are more potent, but CO₂ contributes most to warming because of its prevalence.
- Anthropogenic GHG emissions, to date, amount to a climate forcing roughly equal to 1% of the net incoming solar energy, or the energy equivalent of burning 13 million barrels of oil every minute.

Climate Feedbacks and Inertia
- Climate change is also affected by the Earth’s responses to forcings, known as climate feedbacks. For example, the increase in water vapor that occurs with warming further increases climate forcing and evaporation, as water vapor is a powerful GHG.
- The volume of the ocean results in large thermal inertia that slows the response of climate change to forcings; energy balance changes result in delayed climate response with high momentum.
- As polar ice melts, less sunlight is reflected and the oceans absorb more solar radiation.
- Due to increasing temperature, large reserves of organic matter frozen in subarctic permafrost will thaw and decay, releasing additional CO₂ and methane to the atmosphere. June 2020 was tied for the warmest on record and extreme temperatures in the Arctic (especially Siberia) contributed to large wildfires and further thawing of permafrost. The fires alone were estimated to have released 59 MMT of CO₂ into the atmosphere.
- If GHG emissions were completely eliminated today, climate change impacts would still continue for centuries. The Earth’s temperature requires 25 to 50 years to reach 60% of its equilibrium response.
- Today’s emissions will affect future generations; CO₂ persists in the atmosphere for hundreds of years.

Human Influence on Climate
- Separately, neither natural forcings (e.g., volcanic activity and solar variation) nor anthropogenic forcings (e.g., GHGs and aerosols) can fully explain the warming experienced since 1850.
- Climate models most closely match the observed temperature trend only when natural and anthropogenic forcings are considered together.
- In 2013, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that: “It is extremely likely (>95% certainty) that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century.”
Observed Impacts

Physical Systems

- Average temperatures in 2019 were 0.9°F (1.6°C) higher than in the late 1800s.\(^\text{16}\)
- 2016 was the warmest year on record since records began in 1880. 2016 global average ocean temperatures also experienced a record high. The five warmest years since 1880 have all occurred since 2015, with 2019 ranking as the second warmest and also the 43rd consecutive year that annual global temperatures were above average.\(^\text{19}\)
- Recently, arctic temperatures have risen at more than twice the rate experienced globally. Arctic sea ice is becoming younger, thinner, and less expansive. The 2019 summer extent of ice was the second lowest on record since 1979, 4.15 million square kilometers, 33% smaller than the 1981-2010 average.\(^\text{16}\)
- U.S. average annual precipitation has increased by 4% since 1901, but the intensity and frequency of extreme precipitation events has increased even more, a trend that is expected to continue.\(^\text{17}\)
- In the 20th century, global mean sea level rose between 17 and 21 cm, after having been quite stable over the previous several thousand years.\(^\text{3}\)
- Snow cover has noticeably decreased in the Northern Hemisphere. From 1967-2012, snow cover extent decreased by approximately 53% in June, and around 7% in March and April.\(^\text{4}\)

Biological Systems

- Warming that has already occurred is affecting the biological timing (phenology) and geographic range of plant and animal communities.\(^\text{19}\)
- Relationships such as predator-prey interactions are affected by these shifts, especially when changes occur unevenly between species.\(^\text{20}\)
- Since the start of the 20th century, the average growing season in the U.S. has lengthened by nearly two weeks.\(^\text{27}\)

Predicted Changes

Increased Temperature

- By 2035, IPCC predicts that the temperature will rise between 0.3-0.7°C (0.5-1.3°F). In the long term, global mean surface temperatures are predicted to rise 0.4-2.6°C (0.7-4.7°F) from 2045-2065 and 0.3-4.8°C (0.5-8.6°F) from 2081-2100, relative to the reference period of 1986-2005. Since 1970, global average temperatures have been rising at a rate of 1.7°C per century, significantly higher than the average rate of decline of 0.0°C over the past 7,000 years.\(^\text{5}\)\(^\text{2}\)\(^\text{3}\)
- A warming planet does not simply result in higher average daytime temperatures, the frequency and magnitude of extreme hot days will increase.\(^\text{22}\)

Ocean Impacts

- Models anticipate sea level rise between 26 and 77 cm for a 1°C increase in temperature. The rise will be a result of thermal expansion from warming oceans and additional water added to the oceans by melting glaciers and ice sheets.\(^\text{22}\)
- The oceans absorb about 27% of anthropogenic CO\(_2\) emissions, resulting in increased acidity. Even under conservative projections, coral reefs will be severely impacted.\(^\text{23}\)

Implications for Human and Natural Systems

- Impacts of climate change will vary regionally but are very likely to impose costs that will increase as global temperatures increase.\(^\text{29}\)
- This century, an unprecedented combination of climate change, associated disturbances, and other global change drivers will likely exceed many ecosystems’ capacities for resilience.\(^\text{4}\)\(^\text{4}\)\(^\text{5}\)\(^\text{6}\) Species extinction, food insecurity, human activity constraints, and limited adaptability are risks associated with warming at or above predicted temperatures for the year 2100 (4°C or 7°F above pre-industrial levels).\(^\text{10}\)
- With an increase in average global temperatures of 2°C, nearly every summer would be warmer than the hottest 5% of recent summers.\(^\text{25}\)
- Due to regional variation, a 2-foot rise in sea level would cause relative increases of 3.5 feet in Galveston, TX and 1 foot in Neah Bay, WA.\(^\text{2}\)
- Increased temperatures and changes in precipitation and climate variability would alter the geographic ranges and seasonality of diseases spread by organisms like mosquitoes.\(^\text{25}\)
- Although higher CO\(_2\) concentrations and slight temperature increases can boost crop yields, the negative effects of warming on plant health and soil moisture lead to lower yields at higher temperatures. Intensified soil and water resource degradation resulting from changes in temperature and precipitation will further stress agriculture in certain regions.\(^\text{35}\)


1. Adapted from image by W. Elder, National Park Service.
6. CSS calculation based on data from UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (2003) Climate Change Information Kit.
18. Photo courtesy of the National Snow and Ice Data Center/World Data Center for Glaciology.
Climate Change: Policy and Mitigation

The Challenge
Climate change is a global problem that will require global cooperation to address. The objective of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which virtually all nations, including the U.S., have ratified, is to stabilize greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations at a level that will not cause "dangerous anthropogenic (human-induced) interference with the climate system."

Due to the persistence of some GHGs in the atmosphere, significant emissions reductions must be achieved in coming decades to meet the UNFCCC objective. In 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published the Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C. The report details the impacts of a 1.5°C temperature rise and proposes mitigation strategies to remain below the 1.5°C target. It will require lowering global carbon dioxide (CO\textsubscript{2}) emissions in 2030 by 45% compared to 2010 and will require net zero emissions around 2050. Current national targets under the Paris Agreement would lead to 52–58 gigatons (Gt) CO\textsubscript{2}-equivalents (CO\textsubscript{2}e) per year by 2030 -- not enough to meet the 1.5°C target. 2018 GHG emissions were approximately 42 GtCO\textsubscript{2} and would need to drop to between 25-30 GtCO\textsubscript{2} per year by 2030 to remain on target. 2

In 2018, U.S. GHG emissions were 6.7 GtCO\textsubscript{2}e.

General Policies

Market-Based Instruments
- Market-based approaches include carbon taxes, subsidies, and cap-and-trade programs.
- In a tradable carbon permit system, permits equal to an allowed level of emissions are distributed or auctioned. Parties with emissions below their allowance are able to sell their excess permits to other parties that have exceeded their emissions allowance.
- Market-based instruments are recognized for their potential to reduce emissions by allowing for flexibility and ingenuity in the private sector.

Regulatory Instruments
- Regulatory approaches include non-tradable permits, technology and emissions standards, product bans, and government investment.
- In 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that CO\textsubscript{2} and other GHG emissions meet the Clean Air Act's definition of air pollutants, which are regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). After several appeals, the U.S. Court of Appeals upheld the ruling in 2012.
- In the U.S., the Safer Affordable Fuel-Efficient (SAFE) vehicles rule, administered by NHTSA, was implemented in 2020. In comparison to the 2012 Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards, the SAFE rule has lower efficiency improvement targets of 1.5% per year and will result in 867–923 million metric tons more CO\textsubscript{2} emissions compared to CAFE standards.

Voluntary Agreements
- Voluntary agreements are generally made between a government agency and one or more private parties to "achieve environmental objectives or to improve environmental performance beyond compliance. EPA partners with the public and private sectors to oversee a variety of voluntary programs aimed at reducing GHG emissions, increasing clean energy adoption, and adapting to climate change."

The Kyoto Protocol
- The Kyoto Protocol came into force on February 16, 2005, and established mandatory, enforceable targets for GHG emissions. Initial emissions reductions for participating countries ranged from –8% to +10% of 1990 levels, while the overall reduction goal was 5% below the 1990 level from 2008 to 2012. When the first commitment period ended in 2012, the Protocol was amended for a second commitment period; the new overall reduction goal would be 18% below 1990 levels by 2020.

The Paris Agreement
- In December of 2015, all Parties of the UNFCCC reached a climate change mitigation and adaptation agreement, called The Paris Agreement, in order to keep global temperatures below a 2°C increase above pre-industrial temperatures.
- The Paris Agreement entered into force on November 4, 2016. As of June 2020, The Paris Agreement had 197 signatories of which 189 parties accounting for at least 55% of total global emissions have ratified the agreement.
- In June 2017, President Trump announced that the U.S. would withdraw from the Paris Agreement. The withdrawal is scheduled to take place on November 4, 2020.

Government Action in the U.S.

Federal Policy
- According to the U.S. Senate, “...Congress should enact a comprehensive and effective national program of mandatory, market-based limits and incentives on emissions of greenhouse gases that slow, stop, and reverse the growth of such emissions at a rate and in a manner that will not significantly harm the United States economy and will encourage comparable action by other nations...”
In 2015, the proposed Clean Power Plan set a national limit for CO_2 emissions from power plants. In early 2016, the plan was stayed by the Supreme Court due to several lawsuits against it. In October 2017, the EPA proposed to repeal the Clean Power Plan. The repeal was finalized in 2019 and was replaced by the Affordable Clean Energy Rule.

Due to the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008, large emitters of GHGs in the U.S. must report emissions to the EPA.

In 2019, a Green New Deal resolution was introduced in the U.S. House. It proposes a 10-year mobilization effort to focus on goals such as net-zero GHG emissions, economic security, infrastructure investment, clean air and water, and promoting justice and equality.

State Policy

- Climate change action plans have been enacted by 34 states and D.C.
- 23 states and D.C. have GHG emission reduction targets. For example, California is targeting emissions 40% below 1990 levels by 2030 and economy-wide carbon-neutrality by 2045.
- 29 states, D.C., and three U.S. territories have Renewable Portfolio Standards, which specify the percentage of electricity to be generated from renewable sources by a certain date. Three states have Clean Energy Standards, which specify the percentage of electricity to be generated from low-to-no carbon sources and can include renewables, nuclear, and advanced fossil fuel plants with carbon capture and sequestration. Twenty-five governors have joined the US Climate Alliance, to uphold the GHG reductions outlined in the Paris Agreement. The alliance represents 55% of the U.S. population and more economic activity than all other Paris signatories other than the U.S. and China.

Mitigation Strategies

Stabilizing atmospheric CO_2 concentrations cannot be accomplished without changes in energy production and use. Effective mitigation cannot be achieved without individual agencies working collectively towards reduction goals. Stabilization wedges are one display of GHG reduction strategies; each wedge represents 1 billion tons of carbon avoided per year over 10 years.

- **Energy Savings**: Many energy efficiency efforts require an initial capital investment, but the payback period is often only a few years. In 2016, the Minneapolis Clean Energy Partnership planned to retrofit 75% of Minneapolis homes for efficiency and allocated resources to buy down the cost of energy audits and provide no-interest financing for energy efficiency upgrades.

- **Fuel Switching**: Switching power plants and vehicles to less carbon-intensive fuels can achieve emission reductions quickly. For instance, switching from an average coal plant to a natural gas combined cycle plant can reduce CO_2 emissions by approximately 50%.

- **Capturing and Storing Emissions**: CO_2 can be captured from large point sources both pre- and post-combustion of fossil fuels. Once CO_2 is separated, it can be stored underground depending on the geology of a site. Currently, CO_2 is used in enhanced oil recovery (EOR), but long-term storage technologies remain expensive. Alternatively, existing CO_2 can be removed from the atmosphere through Negative Emissions Technologies and approaches such as direct air capture and sequestration, bioenergy with carbon capture and sequestration, and land management strategies.

Individual Action

- There are many actions that individuals can take to reduce their GHG emissions; many involve energy conservation and also save money.
- Choose a fuel-efficient or electric vehicle and keep your car well maintained, including properly inflated tires.
- Decrease the amount you drive by using public transportation, riding a bike, walking, or telecommuting. For a 20-mile round trip commute, switching to public transit can prevent 4,800 lbs of CO_2 emissions per year.
- Ask your electricity supplier about options for purchasing energy from renewable sources.
- When purchasing appliances, look for the Energy Star label and choose the most energy efficient model.
- Energy Star light bulbs use ~90% less energy than a standard bulb, last 15 times longer, and save ~$55 in electricity costs over their lifetimes.
- Space heating is the largest use of household energy (34%). Ensure that your house is properly sealed by reducing air leaks, installing the recommended level of insulation, and choosing Energy Star windows.

2. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2018) Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5°C.
11. UNFCCC (2020) “What is the Kyoto Protocol.”
12. UNFCCC (2016) Summary of the Paris Agreement.
