



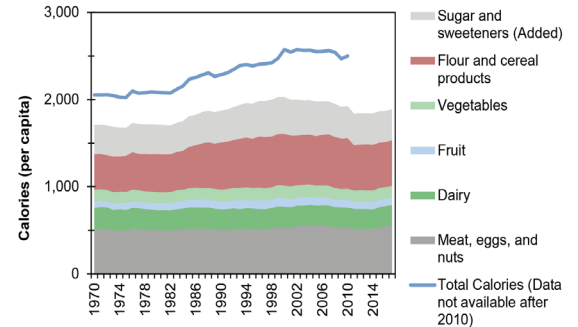
# U.S. Environmental Footprint

The U.S. population is expected to grow from 333 million in 2021 to 404 million by 2060.<sup>1,2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2003, the average American consumed 46 gallons of soft drinks, a 330% increase since 1947.<sup>5</sup> Between 1970 and 2019, per capita milk consumption decreased 49%, down to 11 gallons per year.<sup>6</sup>
- 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.<sup>4,7</sup>
- U.S. per capita consumption of added fats increased by 66% from 1970 to 2010.<sup>4</sup>
- Approximately 41% of U.S. adults and over 20% of adolescents age 12-19 are obese (BMI > 30).<sup>8</sup>
- The EPA estimated that in 2018, more food was landfilled than any other trash material; around 22% of food ends up in landfill.<sup>9</sup> The average American wastes 50% more food than in 1970.<sup>10</sup> This waste accounts for roughly 22% of the municipal solid waste stream and represents a loss of \$450 per person each year.<sup>10,11</sup>

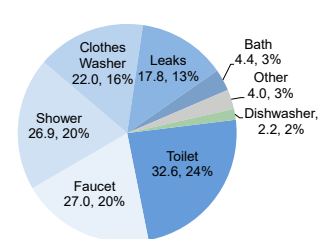
U.S. Daily Per Capita Caloric Intake by Food Type, 1970-2017<sup>4</sup>



## 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%).<sup>12</sup>
- Water use per person was roughly 48% higher in western states than eastern states in 2015, mostly due to crop irrigation in the west.<sup>12</sup> Over 50% of water withdrawals occur in 12 states, 9% in California.<sup>12</sup>
- The average North American household uses roughly 240 gallons of water daily for indoor and outdoor uses.<sup>13</sup>
- Households with more efficient fixtures and no leaks can drop their water usage to 40 gallons per person per day.<sup>13</sup>

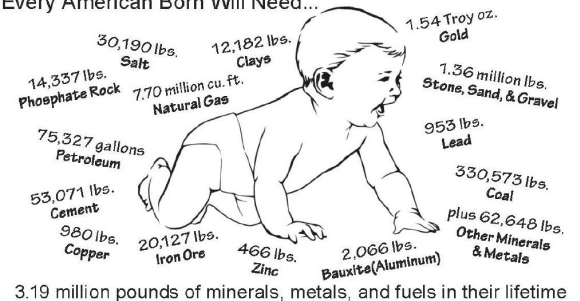
North American Household Water Use<sup>13</sup>  
Gallons Per Household Per Day



## 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.<sup>15</sup>
- In 1900, raw material consumption was less than 2 metric tons per person. At its peak in 2006, it had grown to over 13 metric tons per person.<sup>16,17</sup>
- In 2018, the average American generated 4.9 lbs of municipal solid waste (MSW) each day, with only 1.6 lbs recovered for recycling or composting.<sup>11</sup> For comparison, MSW generation rates (lbs/person/day) were 2.20 in Sweden, 2.98 in the U.K., and 3.71 in Germany.<sup>18</sup>
- In 2018, 32.1% 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.<sup>11</sup>
- Only 53% of Americans are automatically enrolled in curbside recycling programs. In 2016, 82% of cities with curbside recycling collect material single-stream, meaning materials such as glass and paper are separated at the recycling plant.<sup>19,20</sup>

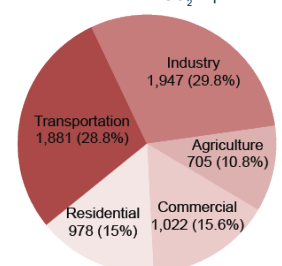
Average American Lifetime Material Consumption<sup>14</sup>  
Every American Born Will Need...



## Greenhouse Gases (GHG)

- In 2019, U.S. GHG emissions were 20 metric tons CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent per person.<sup>21,22</sup>
- From 1990-2019, total annual U.S. GHG emissions increased by 1.8%. Emissions from electricity generation, 25% of the U.S. total, are included by sector in the figure (at right).<sup>21</sup>
- 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<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>23</sup>
- 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.

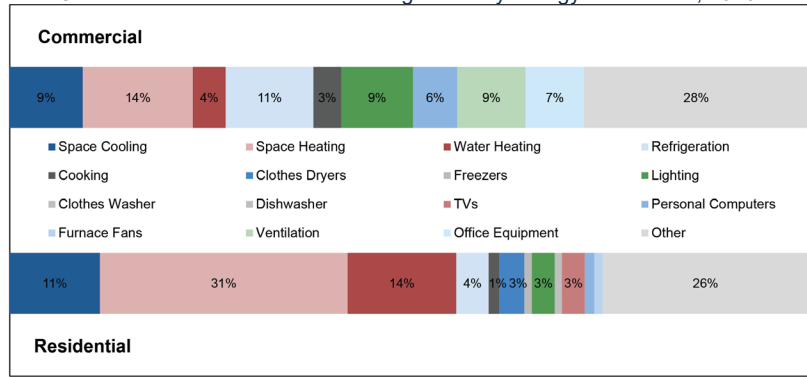
U.S. GHG Emissions, 2019<sup>21</sup>  
Million metric tons CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent



## 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 40%<sup>25,26</sup>
  - Number of occupants per home decreased 15%<sup>27</sup>
  - Living space per person increased 64%.<sup>25,26,27</sup>
- 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 25% from 115,000 Btu/sqft in 1979 to 91,900 Btu/sqft in 2020.<sup>24,28</sup>
- 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.<sup>29</sup>

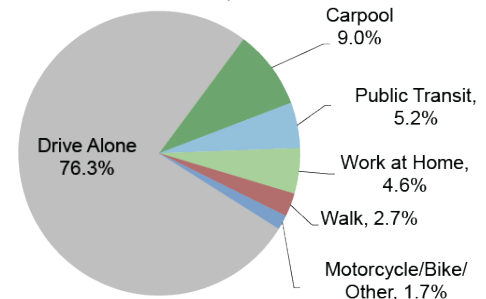
Commercial and Residential Buildings Primary Energy Distribution, 2020<sup>24</sup>



## Transportation

- In 2019, the U.S. had 276.5 million vehicles, 47.8 million more than licensed drivers.<sup>30</sup>
- Drivers traveled over 3.2 trillion vehicle-miles in the U.S. in 2019, a 114% increase since 1980.<sup>30</sup> This is equivalent to more than 6.8 million round-trips to the moon.<sup>31</sup>
- Compared to 1989 models, the average 2019 vehicle's weight increased by 24%, horsepower increased by 90%, and acceleration increased (i.e., 0-60 mph times dropped) by 37%.<sup>32</sup>
- Fuel economy surpassed 1988 levels in 2009 after years of decline.<sup>32</sup>
- The average vehicle occupancy for a passenger car is 1.5, compared to 7.7 for a transit bus and 26.1 for a train.<sup>33</sup>
- Congestion is a worsening urban problem, causing an additional 8.7 billion hours of travel time, 3.5 billion gallons of fuel use, and 68.6 billion pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by urban Americans in 2019.<sup>34</sup>

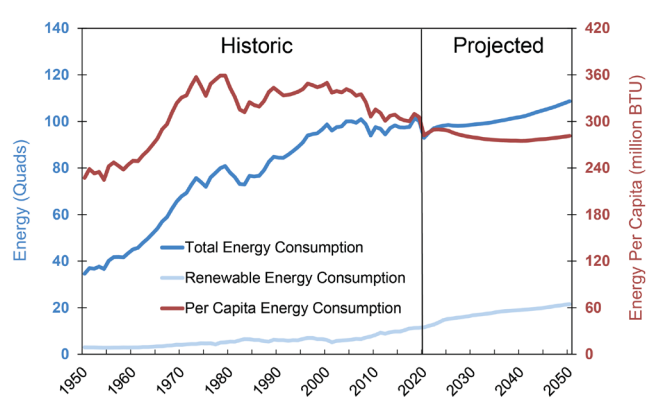
U.S. Modes of Transportation to Work in 2019<sup>33</sup>



## Energy

- In 2019, the U.S. spent \$1.2 trillion on energy, or 5.7% of GDP. When spread over the population, annual costs were \$3,728 per person.<sup>36</sup>
- More U.S. energy comes from petroleum than any other source, comprising nearly 35% of consumption.<sup>35</sup>
- Daily U.S. per capita energy consumption includes 2.3 gallons of oil, 7.89 pounds of coal, and 252 cubic feet of natural gas. Residential daily electricity consumption is 12.1 kilowatt-hours (kWh) per person.<sup>35,37</sup>
- With less than 5% of the world's population, the U.S. consumes 16% 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 4.2% of the world's energy, and accounts for 15% of world GDP; China has 18% of the world's population, consumes 20% of the world's energy, and accounts for 16% of world GDP.<sup>37,38</sup>

U.S. Energy Consumption: Historic and Projected<sup>24,35</sup>



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