

Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Target Setting Policies

In order to complete milestone 2 of the Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) program, participants must set a target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Generally, targets are expressed as a percentage reduction from the emissions inventory baseline year. Targets can differ between community emissions and local government operation emissions. Local governments often set more aggressive targets for their own operations because they have more direct control over these operations. Since targets are set as a percentage of the baseline year, plans for reducing emissions must account for any growth the community will experience between the baseline year and the target year. Therefore, growth should be one of the factors considered when attempting to set a reachable target. Milestone 2 can be established at any time during the CCP program, but is generally completed after the inventory has been compiled. It can also be completed in conjunction with Milestone 3: the Local Action Plan, whereby proposed measures are quantified and then totalled to establish a target based on concrete actions the municipality feels they can accomplish. Given the voluntary nature of the program, once targets have been established, they can always be adjusted at a later date to account for new programs, unforeseen growth or other changes. We encourage setting challenging targets. Low targets are easier to reach; however, higher targets stimulate innovation and creativity.

Canada

In Canada, targets are generally established with input from citizens, non-profit and community groups, the private sector and municipal staff; typically, through the advisory committee. Council must approve the target and timeline for achieving it. Preferred targets are 20% reduction in GHGs from municipal operations and at least a 6% reduction from the community, both within 10 years of joining the program. This target was adopted by the City of Toronto in 1990 as the first GHG reduction target officially adopted by any government body. It has been the standard for participants in the CCP campaign ever since. Other common targets adopted by local governments include:

- A 10% reductions in emissions, within 10 to 15 years of the base year;
- The national Kyoto Protocol target for the country in which the jurisdiction is located; or
- No net greenhouse gas emissions – usually set as a target that drives continual improvement, or to make a strong political statement of commitment.

→ *Note: The target can and should be refined and the goal increased over time. Ultimately a 60% – 80% reduction in GHG emissions is needed to avert the impacts of climate change.*

Halifax, Nova Scotia

Within the forecast section of the inventory, ICLEI provided Halifax with a number of reduction scenarios. In addition to the business-as-usual scenario, ICLEI established a ‘minimum scenario’ based on already planned measures and moderate rates of

participation, a ‘typical scenario’ based on the application of all planned measures and other potential measures and higher participation rates and an ‘optimistic forecast’ based on the greatest emissions reduction achievable. Halifax asked ICLEI to determine whether their current target of 20% reduction below 1997 levels for municipal operations was feasible and to recommend a community target. ICLEI recommended that Halifax maintain their 20% target and adopt the same target for community emissions reductions.

Mississauga, Ontario

The City of Mississauga chose to first develop their local action plan and then set their reduction target based on measures that would be adopted as a result of the plan.

United States

According to the CCP protocol, the city must pass a council resolution establishing an emission reduction target for the city. The target is essential to both foster political will and to create a framework to guide the planning and implementation of measures. A target provides a goal towards which the community and local government can strive and against which progress can be measured. Setting a target also makes reduction efforts more tangible.

From CCP Milestone Guide:

“There is a compelling argument to go further and adopt a more aggressive goal, even if it means a jurisdiction must work harder—that is the argument of ecological necessity. In order to slow global warming, the human community must achieve significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and must achieve the reductions soon. The preponderance of scientific opinion is in agreement that we must reduce greenhouse gas emissions a minimum of 20% below 1990 levels in order to have any impact on global warming.

Today, the human community is producing about twice as much CO₂ as the earth’s various natural carbon sinks (oceans, forests, etc.) can absorb. That means that even if we were to stabilize emissions at current levels, greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere would continue to increase markedly. IPCC research implies that we need to achieve closer to a 60% reduction below 1990 levels to significantly slow global warming. According to the IPCC, “a range of carbon cycle models indicates that stabilization of atmospheric carbon dioxide...could be attained only with global [human-caused] emissions that eventually drop to substantially below 1990 levels.”

The longer we wait to achieve serious reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, the more drastic those reductions will eventually need to be. In the CCP resolution to develop a local climate protection plan, your governing body committed to taking a leadership role in combating global warming by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It can do this by adopting an aggressive, ecologically meaningful target that will prompt creativity and innovation.”

CO2 Reduction Targets Other CCP Jurisdictions Have Adopted

Local Jurisdiction	% below baseline emissions	Target Year
Austin, TX	10-20%	2010
Berkeley, CA	15%	2010
Burien, WA	10%	2010
Burlington, VT	10%	2005
Chula Vista, CA	20%	2010
Durham, NC	5%	2025
Hillsborough Co., FL	20%	2010
Miami-Dade Co., FL	20%	2005
Minneapolis, MN	20%	2005
Oakland, CA	15%	2010
Portland, OR	20%	2010
Saint Paul, MN	20%	2005
Takoma Park, MD	20%	2010
Toledo, OH	20%	2020
Tucson, AZ	20%	2010