



## Reducing Emissions Through Remote Work (Action guide)

In partnership with



### Introduction

Remote working has become a core part of how many SMEs operate, whether introduced recently or embedded for years. While it has the potential to significantly reduce emissions from commuting and office energy use, the environmental impact of remote work is not automatically zero. Home heating, air conditioning and electricity use for office equipment all contribute to an SME's carbon emissions<sup>1</sup>.

This guide outlines practical steps SMEs can take to maximize the climate benefits of remote work. It covers how companies can support low-carbon home working and the key actions employees can take. Both are essential to ensure meaningful emission reductions, whether your team is fully remote or hybrid.

### Why remote work matters for climate action

- **Lower transport emissions:** For many people fewer daily commutes mean reduced congestion, fuel use, and emissions.<sup>2</sup>
- **Reduced office energy consumption:** Less heating, cooling, and lighting in office buildings lowers emissions when space is optimised as more people work remotely.
- **Waste reduction:** Employees may use less paper and other office consumables when working remotely.
- **Cost savings:** Reducing office space and utilities provides direct reductions in expenditure.

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<sup>1</sup> In the GHG Protocol remote working can be included in Scope 3, Category 7 emissions with employee commuting

<sup>2</sup> People who commute longer distances, by car, have the highest emissions reduction potential. Employees who commute short distances by public transport may have lower emissions commuting vs working remotely. This highlights the importance of conducting simple surveys to learn about commuting and home working patterns.

## Key Actions For Companies

By enabling employees to work remotely companies provide the foundations for employees to reduce emissions. Here are some of the key actions that companies can take.

### 1. Conduct a home working survey

Understanding your employees' current remote work patterns and barriers helps identify the biggest opportunities for emission reductions.

**What's involved:** Send a brief survey asking about how people commute and how often they work remotely. Include questions on how they already save energy at home and barriers to doing more as well as interest in sustainability support. You might also want to ask if they'd be willing to switch to renewable energy suppliers if the company provided guidance or group discounts. This will provide useful information for your strategy to cut home working emissions.

### 2. Raise awareness about sustainable home energy use

Remote work can move energy use from office to home, so home efficiency matters.

- Outline benefits to employees of utilizing energy saving efforts at home. Start by outlining key benefits, particularly reduced energy bills. This personal financial benefit often motivates action more than environmental concerns alone.
- Provide a clear checklist of quick actions employees can take, covering everything from turning off devices to going paperless at home. The employee actions section below gives you a ready-made list to share.
- Promote employees switching to renewable energy suppliers where possible.
- Focus particular attention on heating and cooling, as these are normally the two largest contributors to home working emissions depending on where employees live. Share practical guides on optimising heating and cooling use. For example, turning the thermostat down in winter when it's cold and up in summer when it's hot. Timing heating to warm rooms just before the working day starts works well too.
- Explain why reducing emissions from home working matters to the company. People will feel their actions matter more when part of a wider plan.
- Provide small incentives (e.g., mentions in team meetings) for employees who demonstrate innovative low-carbon habits at home. It encourages others whilst providing recognition to those taking action.

This information can be conveyed in a regular email or through a short 'lunch and learn' event to get everyone onboard.

### 3. Help employees reduce their digital carbon footprint at home

The most impactful way employees can reduce their digital footprint is by extending device lifespan. Provide guidance on proper care and maintenance so devices last longer, covering basics like regular software updates, proper shutdown procedures, and keeping devices clean and well-ventilated. Offer repair options if possible and when a device really does need replacing,

provide clear recycling policies so old equipment is disposed of responsibly rather than ending up in landfill.

While it has a smaller impact than device longevity, promoting good digital habits around cloud storage and file management can also help. Encourage employees to regularly clean up cloud storage, delete unnecessary files, and avoid sending unnecessarily large email attachments - using cloud sharing links instead. As AI tools become more common in business, promote mindful use by encouraging employees to utilize them efficiently.

#### **4. Optimize hybrid work schedules and office space**

Coordinate in-office days to minimize building energy use. Encourage teams to align their office days so you can fully utilize heating, cooling, and lighting on specific days while potentially shutting down or reducing energy use on quieter days. This approach works particularly well for smaller businesses where you can coordinate across the whole team.

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### **Key Actions For Employees**

Remote working requires direct involvement from employees in order for emissions to be reduced. Companies can raise awareness and educate but employees are the ones who need to take action and they often appreciate a simple checklist of actions to tick off. Share this checklist, and add your own ideas, to help employees take immediate action.

- Only heat, or cool, the rooms you need
- Turn PCs and laptops off when you've finished work
- Turn the lights off in rooms you're not using
- Wear clothing that saves energy (e.g. winter jumper, summer shorts)
- Turn off devices that are idle most of the time like printers
- Switch to renewable energy
- Turn heating down by 1C or air conditioning up by 1C. If it's comfortable leave it there
- To save on air conditioning, air the the room when it's cool outside, draw blinds when it's hot
- Go paperless

These simple changes add up to meaningful emission reductions and lower energy bills.

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### **Cost Implications**

Shifting to or improving remote work can generate cost savings, but may also introduce new expenses:

#### **Potential Savings**

- Reduced office rental or the possibility to downsize to smaller premises or utilise more affordable co-working spaces.
- Lower utility bills for both the company and employees (heating, cooling, electricity).

### **Potential Costs**

- Providing or subsidising energy-efficient equipment (e.g., laptops, office furniture).
- Providing IT infrastructure and cybersecurity tools for remote access.

### **Summary**

Remote work shifts energy use from the workplace to the home<sup>3</sup>. However, a combination of the company and employee actions in this guide can reduce emissions while also saving costs through reduced office space, lower utility bills, and longer-lasting equipment. Even better, many of the actions in this guide can be started today.

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<sup>3</sup> A fully remote worker can add around 650kg of carbon emissions to their company's footprint. Calculations based on UK DESNZ emissions factors.