

Net zero

The role of veterinary workplaces
in tackling climate change

A strong voice for vets

Executive summary

We know that veterinary professionals care about climate change and environmental sustainability, but with busy workloads and competing priorities, it's difficult to engage with such a big challenge. There are strong ethical, businesses, and One Health reasons why veterinary workplaces must take action, but it can still feel very daunting to do so.

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Climate change will be potentially the biggest global health threat of the 21st century, and this will directly affect the veterinary sector. It will affect our team members, businesses and the animals we care for. The science is clear that, in order to avoid the worst impacts, rapid reductions in greenhouse gas emissions must be made and 'net zero' achieved by the middle of the century.

Purpose of the report



This report is designed to motivate and empower anyone working in veterinary workplaces to take serious action to help decarbonise the sector. We've drawn on advice from a wide range of trusted sources and research on tackling climate change, pulling together the information we think is most helpful for our industry.

Guidance and resources for veterinary workplaces



We've included actions for individuals, teams and the entire veterinary community to consider, providing guidance for everyone, no matter where they are on their sustainability journey. We've also included motivational case studies to provide inspiration, and links to useful resources for more detailed information. We hope this will help to break down the challenges and empower everyone to contribute towards our vision for more sustainable veterinary workplaces.

Key findings and actions



This report provides a comprehensive roadmap for veterinary workplaces to contribute to the UK's net zero targets. It recognises that responsibility lies with everyone working in veterinary workplaces, including veterinary professionals, team members, business owners and leaders of veterinary organisations. It outlines the key role everyone plays in reducing global greenhouse gas emissions, not only through direct actions within the workplace but also by influencing related industries, such as agriculture and pet care. The report draws on the latest research and trusted sources to offer actionable steps for individuals, teams, and organisations at all stages of their sustainability journey. Additionally, it highlights the business and ethical imperatives for immediate action, supported by motivational case studies and resources for deeper engagement.

The importance of immediate action and sector leadership



The veterinary sector must act now if it is to maintain trust and credibility, both in mitigating its own environmental footprint and as an advocate for animal health and welfare. In recent years we've seen huge efforts from members of our own profession, and from other healthcare sectors, to reduce their carbon footprints. But we know there is much more work to be done to avoid the potentially catastrophic effects of climate change, and we hope this report inspires and supports everyone to contribute to our vision for a decarbonised veterinary sector.

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Foreword



Anna Judson
BVA SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT



Ed Bailey
VET SUSTAIN CHAIR

In many of the conversations I had throughout my time as BVA President, I heard from numerous veterinary professionals who shared my passion for protecting our environment. As a health-centred sector, we understand that human, animal, and environmental health and wellbeing are inherently connected, and that we all have a duty to protect all three. BVA's 'Voice' survey results consistently back this up, showing how important environmental sustainability is to the veterinary profession.

I've been hugely inspired by the efforts made in veterinary workplaces so far. Through our #GreenTeamVet campaign, BVA has been encouraging veterinary professionals to become more sustainable, including by supporting the launch of Vet Sustain's [Veterinary Carbon Calculator](#), considering environmental impacts in every policy we produce, and BVA has been showing leadership by repeatedly achieving Investors in the Environment's top "Green accreditation". This report is the latest in our line of resources designed to support the profession to become greener.

I am so proud to start my year as BVA Senior Vice President with the publication of this report, and I truly hope it inspires everyone in our sector to take bolder action on climate change, for the good of people, animals and the planet.



Through our #GreenTeamVet campaign, BVA has been encouraging veterinary professionals to become more sustainable."

Vet Sustain was founded in 2019 by a group of veterinary professionals who recognised the widespread enthusiasm in the profession to take action towards a more sustainable future. Our mission is to enable and inspire veterinary professionals to continually improve the health and wellbeing of animals, people and the environment. That vision has been embraced by the profession, with support from the BVA, specialist divisions and SPVS, and recently the launch of the Environmental Sustainability module for RCVS Practice Standards.

Net zero warming is one of the six [Veterinary Sustainability Goals](#), which we derived from the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) as a framework for action. Net zero has often been poorly understood as a concept, and even used as something of a political football, portrayed as an optional brake on our prosperity. In reality, as this report shows, it is an essential backbone of our development as a profession and a society. Even if we knew nothing about the warming effects of fossil fuel derived greenhouse gases, all the actions we need to take to achieve net zero would still be desirable. Clean, renewable energy which can be owned and generated locally, clean air to breathe, clean water to drink and bathe, flourishing ecosystems, abundant wildlife, healthy soil, a circular economy with no waste and a regenerative food system are all key ingredients to a flourishing sustainable society. Vets can play an important role as advocates for this future, both in our own operations and for the animals and ecosystems under our care. Animal welfare is integral to this vision, with all life, both kept and wild, being respected and nurtured.

Vet Sustain has a wealth of [resources](#), [tools](#) and [training](#) to help you better understand the science and the interconnectedness of different aspects of veterinary sustainability and what you can do to take positive action. As veterinary professionals, we are privileged to be at the nexus of science, people, animals and an understanding of behavioural change. This position represents a tremendous opportunity to become sustainability changemakers in a way that is personally and professionally fulfilling. I hope this report empowers us to act as leaders towards this more hopeful future.

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■ Introduction

Our vision is for a veterinary sector in 2050 that has adapted to support the UK's net zero targets, is trusted on mitigating its own carbon footprint, and leading as a strong advocate for environmental sustainability and its benefits to human and animal health and wellbeing.



As a health-centred sector, and key player in the One Health Agenda, veterinary professionals recognise the interconnections between human, animal and environmental health and wellbeing. Veterinary teams are well aware that climate change and environmental degradation will have a significant negative impact on human and animal health and wellbeing, so it is no surprise that 93% of vets say that sustainability is important to them.¹

Considering the role of veterinary workplaces in working towards the UK's net zero targets is essential, as their work and the animals they care for contribute to global greenhouse gas emissions, and therefore to global warming. The influence of the sector also extends beyond the activities of individual veterinary professionals and businesses, being closely involved with many other sectors, organisations and people who have a direct impact on the environment, including animal owners, the farming

community, government, and industry, as well as personal and professional communities.

Additionally, sustainability initiatives can benefit animal welfare,² but care must be taken to ensure they do not inadvertently compromise it, so it is vital that everyone working in veterinary workplaces use their unique mix of knowledge and experience to positively influence those they interact with.

¹ BVA Voice of the veterinary profession survey 2024

² For example, preventative health measures introduced to reduce medicines use will also benefit animal welfare



The impacts of climate change

The latest [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\) report](#) shows that failing to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels risks reaching climatic tipping points and losing control of the climate for good. A degraded environment will have a big impact on human and animal health and welfare, with the negative health impacts increasing in frequency and severity if the temperature rise exceeds 1.5°C.

Direct impacts for both humans and animals will include altered temperatures, rising ocean levels, habitat destruction, and increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, as well as unexpected threats such as epidemics or even pandemics, fires, floods and droughts. Increased heat also has a physiological effect on both humans and animals, amplifying existing heat-related health problems and potentially increasing vulnerability to diseases. Indirect effects may include changing patterns of vector-borne diseases and wildlife migration, increasing levels of parasitic disease, reduced animal growth rates and productivity, decreased food availability for wildlife and changing patterns of global food production and consumption, reducing human food security. In short, climate change will be potentially the biggest global health threat of the 21st century,³ and will directly affect the veterinary sector.

The science is clear that, in order to avoid catastrophic climate change, rapid reductions in greenhouse gas emissions must be made and 'net zero' achieved by the middle of the century.⁴ This means reducing emissions to as close to zero as possible by 2050, with the remaining emissions absorbed through natural carbon sinks such as forests, and potentially by new technologies such as carbon capture, so that the overall impact is zero. Globally, 88% of emissions are now covered by net zero targets,⁵ with countries coming together regularly to form legally binding agreements through the [Conference of the Parties \(COP\) process](#). Most famously, the [Paris agreement \(2015\)](#) saw countries unanimously agree to achieve net zero by 2050, and the UK subsequently signed this into domestic law, requiring the Government to prepare, communicate and maintain progressively more ambitious emissions reductions. The [Climate Change Act](#) commits the UK Government by law to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 100% of 1990 levels (net zero) by 2050, though recent analysis⁶ suggested the UK was not on track to meet this. The UK's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) in line the Paris agreement also include a commitment to reducing economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions by at least 68% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels.⁷

3 Costello, A., Abbas, M, Allen, A. et al., (2009), Managing the health effects of climate change: lancet and University College London Institute for Global Health Commission. *The Lancet*, 373(9676), 1693-1733

4 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report 2023 www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-cycle/

5 United Nations Climate Action webpage www.un.org/en/climatechange/net-zero-coalition

6 Climate Change Committee 2023 Progress Report to Parliament www.theccc.org.uk/publication/2023-progress-report-to-parliament/

7 UK's Nationally Determined Contribution, updated September 2022 www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uks-nationally-determined-contribution-communication-to-the-unfccc

RESOURCES

[Climate Change Committee information on "what is climate change"](#)

[World Veterinary Association position on the climate emergency](#)

[United Nations resources and campaigns on Climate Action](#)

[The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\), the United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change](#)

[BVA Green Team Vet resources page](#)

[Vet Sustain supports veterinary professionals to become leading forces for sustainability](#)

Veterinary workplaces taking action

There are strong ethical, business, and One Health reasons why veterinary workplaces must take action, which are explained in the next section of this report. In recent years there have been major efforts to raise awareness of the sector's role in tackling environmental issues, with a wealth of resources now available to support this.

Vet Sustain was founded to support veterinary professionals to drive change towards a more sustainable future, and the British Veterinary Association has regularly advocated for action through their [#GreenTeamVet campaigns](#). But more work is urgently needed, and veterinary workplaces have an opportunity to not only contribute, but to lead and advocate in the One Health space to ensure the UK reaches net zero and tackles climate change.

BVA and Vet Sustain acknowledge that every individual, team and workplace will be starting from a different place, that some will have greater potential impacts than others, and all will have different deadlines for when they can realistically reach net zero. No matter where they start from, everyone must take responsibility for the emissions they can control, and do all they can to help reduce their impacts as much as possible.

Key definitions

Net zero means total greenhouse gas emissions are equal to or less than the emissions we remove from the environment, with any residual emissions which cannot be reduced to zero being matched by greenhouse gases being actively removed from the atmosphere. At the UK level, the 'net zero target' refers to a government commitment to ensure the UK reduces its greenhouse gas emissions by 100% from 1990 levels by 2050. If met, this would mean the amount of greenhouse gas emissions produced by the UK would be equal to or less than the emissions removed by the UK from the environment.

Carbon neutral is often used interchangeably with 'net zero', but the two are not the same. In general, carbon neutrality means balancing emissions with carbon offsets, without necessarily having reduced emissions by an amount consistent with reaching net zero at the global or sector level.

Definitions based on those provided by [UK Government](#) and [Science Based Targets](#)

We also understand that this challenge can feel daunting, as it will take a significant amount of work to achieve. In this report, we've drawn on advice from a wide range of trusted sources and research on tackling climate change, pulling together the most important points to provide guidance for everyone working in a veterinary workplace. It includes actions to consider at individual, team and profession level, as well as motivational case studies and links to useful resources, to provide inspiration and information to help everyone to work towards net zero. We hope this will help to break down the challenge and empower everyone to contribute towards our vision for a decarbonised veterinary sector.

Why veterinary workplaces should take action

We know that environmental sustainability is important to individual veterinary professionals, and that many are already taking steps to improve their carbon footprint. However, everyone must juggle busy roles and competing priorities, such as clients, patients, CPD, ethical dilemmas, research, as well as their own work-life balance, meaning it's easy to feel overwhelmed or to prioritise immediate issues instead of long-term environmental action.

It is important not to lose sight of the strong ethical, business, and One Health reasons why veterinary workplaces must play their role in UK efforts to reach net zero and tackle climate change. This section outlines some of the most important reasons veterinary professionals, teams and workplaces should prioritise taking action.



A duty to act

Veterinary professionals, in their role as advocates for animal health and welfare and public health, have a responsibility to protect ecosystem health and demand action to minimise climate change.⁸ The World Veterinary Association (WVA) urges its Member Associations to build and enhance veterinary capacity within their country and region to prevent and address consequences associated with climate change.

The RCVS codes of conduct explicitly require veterinary professionals to “seek to ensure the protection of public health and animal health and welfare, and must consider the impact of their actions on the environment”.⁹ RCVS day one competencies for veterinary surgeons also require graduates to be able to “Promote the health and safety of people and the environment”.¹⁰

Veterinary professionals are acutely aware of the interconnections between the health of humans, animals and the environment. Global warming is predicted to have severe consequences for human and animal wellbeing, and failure to meet net zero goals will increase the health and welfare risks for all, including the people we work with and animals under our care.¹¹ This contravenes with the veterinary oath “to ensure the health and welfare of animals committed to my care”,¹² and could negatively impact public perception of the profession as one dedicated to protecting animal health and welfare.

Veterinary workplaces must support professionals to fulfil their oaths. Larger veterinary businesses also have a responsibility to show leadership on climate change and environmental sustainability. Failure to act could also be in breach of legal requirements. For example, the Streamlined Energy and Carbon Reporting (SECR) regulations require large businesses to report energy usage, carbon footprint, and greenhouse gas emissions within their annual financial reports.

⁸ Adapted from the WVA statement on the global climate emergency: https://worldvet.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/wva_position_on_the_global_climate_change_emergency_22apr2021x.pdf

⁹ Professional responsibilities, 6.1, in both RCVS Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons and RCVS Code of Conduct for Veterinary Nurses

¹⁰ RCVS day one competencies, number 44. www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/rcvs-day-one-competences-feb-2022/

¹¹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report 2023 www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-cycle/

¹² Declaration on admission to the profession, in both RCVS Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons and RCVS Code of Conduct for Veterinary Nurses



Opportunity, influence and leading by example

Veterinary professionals and their teams have unique opportunities to take action on climate change. Firstly, they have the opportunity to reduce their workplace's significant carbon footprint, generated through day-to-day activities, such as energy use for running buildings, use of anaesthetic gases, travel and transport, waste generation, purchase of products, use of technology including data storage, and use of financial services including banking and pension providers.

In addition, they have the opportunity to affect the carbon emissions of the many other sectors they are closely linked with. Entrusted with the care of companion animals, and advising on the husbandry and management of livestock, veterinary professionals have enormous potential to influence the carbon footprint of the animals under their care.¹³ Food producing animals in particular can have a very significant carbon footprint, and with a relatively small number of vets working with these species, each individual has huge potential to make a positive impact when advising clients on ways to lower that environmental impact. Veterinary professionals working with food producing animals can uniquely influence the future of food sustainability and security as vets on farms have the opportunity to reframe advice with a more climate focused lens.

As scientists positioned at the human-animal-environmental interface, skills acquired by veterinary professionals give them an advantage in understanding and communicating climate science. Their work also gives them an insight into the damaging effects that our changing planet is having on animals, which can be useful in topical discussions around sustainability. Veterinary professionals undertake varied roles across a wide range of animal species and workplaces, including in government, research, education, industry and NGOs, so their position as trusted professionals provide ideal opportunities to influence climate action. Leading by example, veterinary professionals and their teams can foster a culture of sustainability that extends beyond their workplaces, contributing to a healthier planet for all species.

RESOURCES

[Vet Sustain resource on Environmental sustainability, veterinary professionals and mental wellbeing](#)

[BVA blog post explaining BVA's work on #GreenTeamVet](#)

[BVA blog post explaining The business benefits of sustainability](#)

[Article by Deluty *et al* 2021 showing that Client Choice May Provide an Economic Incentive for Veterinary Practices to Invest in Sustainable Infrastructure and Climate Change Education](#)

[Article by Sedman 2020 on The business case for sustainability](#)

¹³ Prentis, A. (2021). The carbon footprint of the animals under our care. *Veterinary Practice*, Mar, 21.

The impact on business

Reducing the carbon footprint of veterinary workplaces can bring cost savings, and is essential for business resilience and the ability to provide outstanding veterinary care into the future. It is always good practice to review business policies, and changes to the way an organisation considers resource use and/or the purchase and disposal of products can bring immediate financial savings through improved efficiency and waste reduction. In the longer term, reviewing business practises for sustainability can help to future proof the organisation,¹⁴ as it requires leaders to consider the potential impacts on clients and supply chains, and how this may affect veterinary business activities. For example, as climate change affects livelihoods and increases food prices, it could affect animal welfare and lead to clients forgoing early or preventative treatments in an attempt to save money, also impacting the veterinary business. Engaging with this topic now is also likely to help businesses comply with any future legislation introduced or expanded to help the UK achieve net zero, which may help to minimise operational disruption and financial uncertainty in the future.

It is well documented that businesses with good environmental credentials have improved recruitment, wellbeing and retention of team members,¹⁵ and the BVA Voice survey highlights that a high proportion of veterinary professionals care about environmental sustainability. Integrating sustainability into your practice's ethos may improve employee retention as well as attract new graduates, as team members may feel anxious about the impacts climate change will bring, so workplaces showing awareness and engagement with the sustainability agenda will better support them. Engaging in environmentally friendly behaviour makes people feel good,¹⁶ so workplaces supporting sustainability initiatives can have a positive impact on morale and mental wellbeing. Practising sustainability can also drive innovation among the workforce.¹⁷ Creating a greener environment, eg by planting trees and green spaces, can also improve staff wellbeing through access to nature.¹⁸

These benefits to mental health and wellbeing are especially important in the highly demanding roles most veterinary professionals undertake. As well as the long-term positive impacts on the team, this can bring benefits such as increased productivity and reduced sickness, which also has a financial benefit for the business.

As awareness of environmental issues generally increases, clients will be more likely to expect veterinary professionals to care about the planet and long-term impacts on the health and welfare of all animals. Improved environmental standards can therefore benefit client recruitment and retention, especially if the organisation's sustainability credentials are known to the community in which they are embedded. Some research suggests that many clients would be willing to pay more for veterinary services delivered with reduced environmental impacts,¹⁹ though efforts to improve sustainability can also be communicated as ways to save money, being linked to improved animal welfare and reduced waste or use of medicines. Sustainability initiatives can also include clients and provide opportunities for engagement, which further increases bonds in the community.



These benefits to mental health and wellbeing are especially important in the highly demanding roles most veterinary professionals face."

Finally, it must be remembered that climate change is predicted to have disastrous consequences for millions of people's livelihoods, ways of life, and health,²⁰ including for those working in the veterinary sector. Working to mitigate those impacts is essential to protect the health of every veterinary professional.

¹⁴ Ortiz-de-Mandojana, N., & Bansal, P. (2016). The long term benefits of organizational resilience through sustainable business practices. *Strategic management journal*, 37(8), 1615-1631.

¹⁵ Eg Kane, A. (2011). Green recruitment, development and engagement. *Going green: The psychology of sustainability in the workplace*, 6.


¹⁶ Venhoeven, L. A., Bolderdijk, J. W., & Steg, L. (2016). Why acting environmentally-friendly feels good: Exploring the role of self-image. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7, 1846.

¹⁷ Capozucca, P., & Sarni, W. (2012). Sustainability 2.0 using sustainability to drive business innovation and growth. *Deloitte Review*, 10, 139-147.

¹⁸ Souter-Brown, G., Hinckson, E., & Duncan, S. (2021). Effects of a sensory garden on workplace wellbeing: A randomised control trial. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 207, 103997.

¹⁹ Deluty, S. B., et al. (2021). Client choice may provide an economic incentive for veterinary practices to invest in sustainable infrastructure and climate change education. *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*, 7, 622199.

²⁰ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report 2023 www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-cycle/



The role of individuals, teams and communities



Individuals

With the scale of challenges the planet faces, many individuals may feel disempowered, questioning how they can personally make a difference. Yet in our latest survey, 93% of vets say that environmental sustainability is important to them personally.²¹ If this percentage of the profession were to take steps individually to improve their carbon footprints, they would collectively and cumulatively make a significant positive impact.

At the individual level, it's helpful to focus on any changes that can be made, rather than becoming overwhelmed by those that cannot. Some people may feel that the responsibility to make change lies with government or large businesses, but it's important to recognise that protecting the environment is everyone's responsibility, at all levels. Everyone working in veterinary workplaces, including veterinary professionals, team members, business owners and leaders of veterinary organisations have a role to play. It is also important not underestimate an individual's power to influence others to take action through the examples they personally set, which could ultimately lead to the bigger systemic changes that are urgently needed. The following tips highlight areas we think everyone working in veterinary workplaces should be considering.

As an individual in the veterinary sector, you can support wider efforts to achieve net zero by:

- **Learning more about climate change:** Everyone should have an understanding of the basics of climate science, how the veterinary sector is impacting our planet, and how climate change impacts the profession. Education and training will help to improve understanding of the issues and possible solutions, and boost confidence in talking about any changes being made with clients, colleagues, and suppliers.
- **Making sustainable choices:** Everyone should consider their own choices, both at work and at home, and make the most sustainable decisions they can. Getting started can feel overwhelming, so it's a good idea to start with 'easy wins' that help maintain motivation. Individuals can also consider doing a personal carbon footprint calculation to make it easier to see which areas they can make the most impact in, helping to set achievable goals and gradually work to reduce their own environmental footprint. Individual actions can make a significant impact over time and as part of collective action, and by demonstrating that it is possible to routinely make more sustainable decisions can inspire others to do the same.

RESOURCES

[Vet Sustain](#) provide a wealth of useful sustainability resources and training courses for veterinary professionals

[BVA's Green Team Vet resource page](#) signposts to sustainability resources for veterinary workplaces

[Sustainable-ish](#) provides everyday sustainability advice for the "imperfectly green" from veterinary professional Jen Gale

The environment section of [Positive.News](#) provides inspiring stories of real world progress

[BVA blog post explaining How do I get my boss to care about sustainability?](#)

[BVA blog post explaining How can RVNs help empower the veterinary team to go green?](#)

- **Providing advice and inspiration:** Encouraging others to make sustainable choices can amplify an individual's impact. Veterinary professionals are trusted advisers on caring for animals and are trained to communicate scientific information in accessible ways. As colleagues, they also play an important role in influencing each other's decisions and actions. Everyone in a veterinary workplace will have different opportunities to influence those they work with, putting them in unique positions to make an impact by advising your clients and colleagues on how to make more sustainable choices, eg through preventative health care, sustainable farming practices that balance climate, biodiversity, animal welfare and social outcomes, being conscientious about food by choosing to eat "[less and better](#)" animal-based products, and advocating for animal welfare. Simply starting a conversation about personal choices made could create a ripple effect, inspiring wider action and shifting the dial on what is considered the 'normal' way to act.
- **Demanding change:** It's important to ask for changes to happen, as teams and leaders may be more open to sustainability initiatives than expected. Individuals can encourage others to engage with the steps outlined in the 'Teams' section of this booklet, and use the information provided in the opening sections to help you make the case. Everyone can also demand change from other organisations by 'voting' with what they buy or request from suppliers, both personally and at work, which ultimately could lead to the big, systemic changes needed.
- **Joining a community:** Talking to other individuals working to make a positive impact can support mental wellbeing, help provide access to information, and amplify impacts through greater community action. Community groups could be in person, eg a local [Wildlife Trust](#), or online, eg the [Veterinary Sustainability Forum](#).





Laura Binnie

Vet and Sustainability Lead Paragon Veterinary Group

It sounds silly now, but when we first formed our Green Group, I didn't really know where to start on our mission to reduce our carbon emissions. I was very passionate about the subject, but it felt quite overwhelming and I worried that if we didn't do things perfectly, we might be accused of being frauds or greenwashing. Now, with experience and a little hindsight, I know it doesn't matter if you try something and it doesn't work out.

My top tip on starting to reduce your carbon footprint would be to join a network and spend time upskilling yourself with some climate-related CPD. For me and our Green Group, this involved attending webinars and undertaking carbon literacy training. We began networking and joining veterinary sustainability working groups, and did a lot of research. I joined the Vet Sustain Greener Veterinary Practice working group, which introduced me to like-minded vet professionals with a shared passion for finding sustainability solutions. The mutual support of others in this field will be invaluable and will help you get through the tricky bits.

At times I felt frustrated some new initiatives weren't followed as precisely as I would have liked, but it's a journey for all of us and I learnt to be more understanding and patient. Everyone in the team has their own values and expectations, so communication is key. I've learnt that asking for and acting on feedback helps engage others with your vision, and we have all learnt a lot from each other along the way.

To begin with, I led our sustainability plan from within our small animal leadership team, but I had other responsibilities which often took priority over my sustainability tasks, so everything moved quite slowly. I later moved into our business support team to allow me to focus some of my time solely on sustainability across the business, and this has been invaluable to our progress. I've also had the opportunity to deliver Carbon Literacy Training across XLVets, and to talk about our work at major veterinary conferences.

I'm extremely proud to have led our team through achieving the Investors in the Environment Silver Award and to be the first practice to receive the RCVS PSS Environmental Sustainability award. We also gained an RHS garden award for our efforts towards biodiversity and community, thanks to planning and planting a three-hectare woodland, which will help to offset some of our emissions. I was honoured to be named "Green Individual Vet Personality of the Year 2024" by The Webinar Vet and am so proud that my passion has inspired others to help tackle climate change, reduce emissions and support biodiversity too.





HELEN GOULD

VET AND OWNER, OLD HALL VETS

It's hard to remember a time when I wasn't interested in climate change, the environment and sustainability – I even built my own underground eco-house which appeared on Grand Designs. In 2015 Old Hall Vets moved premises, which was an ideal opportunity to implement some structural changes and build a more sustainable practice.

I am fortunate to have employed an ace team who have embraced my passion for sustainability, got on board with our green journey and are a joy to be around. Our first actions were to set up a user-friendly recycling system, start measuring our electric, water, waste to landfill and paper use and to change our anaesthetic circuit to a low flow ADE. Making the shift in anaesthetic circuits to the ADE was a game changer, which involved quite a leap of faith for the clinical staff, but they embraced it and led the way.

We reduced electricity use by 18% in the first year alone by installing a more efficient heater, implementing a heating and cooling protocol, and turning off all appliances every night – which also

saved us a lot of money. A brick in the toilet cisterns reduced water use and, more recently, we have moved to Sterilium for hand sterilisation.

I think I'm most proud of our efforts to reduce waste to landfill: we now compost all the used paper towels, kitchen waste and animal hair, and I use the compost on my veg patch. In the first year alone, this cut our waste to landfill in half. We also cut paper use through a concerted effort to move more clients onto electronic communications and making double-sided printing the default. All of these efforts have contributed significantly to cutting our carbon emissions.

As time has progressed all staff (even the most sceptical) have become more and more committed to our sustainability goals and actively contribute ideas for further actions. The environment really has become a central part of the way we work and the decisions we make. I'm so proud of this, as it shows true behavioural change which will spread ripples beyond the vet practice and into the lives of everyone we work with.

My advice for anyone wanting to encourage others to be more sustainable would be to start slowly and introduce change in manageable chunks to help bring people with you. Get baseline data so you can demonstrate change, start with some easy wins, and don't forget to celebrate achievements and encourage everyone to contribute. Before you know it, you will create an environment where everyone feels proud to do their bit, and saving energy isn't a chore but a feel-good exercise.



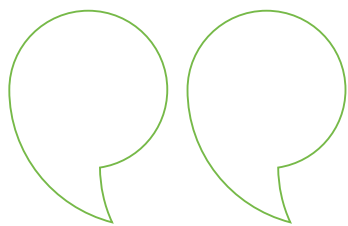
Teams

All veterinary workplaces need to consider their environmental impacts, from clinical practice, to Government offices to research institutes. Individual teams in a workplace can work together to reduce their impact, and to influence higher levels of the organisation, colleagues, clients and stakeholders they work with. The following tips highlight areas we think all teams in a veterinary workplace should be considering.

Every team working in the veterinary sector can support wider efforts to achieve net zero by:

- **Committing to sustainability:** Making a clear commitment is the first step to creating a culture of sustainability. In a busy organisation, there will be many routine decisions with a potential impact, such as choosing to recycle waste, how to travel to and from work, and which companies to order supplies from. A change in mindset will be essential to ensure positive choices for the environment become the norm in all decision-making processes. Ensuring you have a sustainability lead and/or a staff green group, and creating an environmental policy with sign off from senior leaders is a good place to start. This should be followed up with policies and targets which empower staff to make sustainable choices.
- **Improving overall team knowledge:** Teams should ensure they collectively have sufficient knowledge of environmental issues, the impacts their work may have, and ways to improve sustainability in their workplace. They should work together to identify strengths and weaknesses in their collective knowledge and consider how to best use CPD allocations to improve this.
- **Planning for action:** Teams should develop a realistic action plan to help achieve their sustainability goals, breaking down the changes needed into those can be achieved now, and others to work on in the future. The overall challenge may seem daunting, so making a clear plan and including some 'easy wins' to start with can help to boost motivation and make it feel more achievable. A useful starting place is to complete a carbon footprint to identify and quantify the emissions associated with all aspects of the organisation, possibly using a tool such as [The Veterinary Carbon Calculator](#) to help. The team can then use this to identify potential areas in which to make the greatest immediate impact, to make longer term pledges, and to monitor and review progress. Refer to the "Four steps to net zero" section for more information.





Sharing ideas, experiences and information with other veterinary teams will help teams in their sustainability efforts."

- **Demanding change:** Teams are often in a good position to demand change from those they work with. Wherever possible, teams should choose suppliers which share their environmental values, and request environmental commitments, products or actions from others. Teams working within larger organisations should also use their influence to request changes at higher levels of the organisation, as leaders may be more open to sustainability initiatives than expected.
- **Informing clients and stakeholders:** It's important to shout about the team's progress, to celebrate achievements, realise all of the business benefits, and inspire others to be more sustainable. Consider accreditation schemes such as [Investors in the Environment \(iE\)](#), or awards such as those available through the [Practice Standards Scheme \(PSS\)](#) to provide external validation of your improvements.
- **Join the conversation:** To combat climate change, organisations within and outside the veterinary sector will need to work together to campaign on key issues and to find solutions, sharing knowledge, resources, and recognition. Sharing ideas, experiences and information with other veterinary teams will help teams in their sustainability efforts, and amplify their impacts through greater community action. This could include supporting BVA and Vet Sustain social media campaigns, or joining sustainability focussed events and discussion forums, such as the [Veterinary Sustainability Forum](#).

RESOURCES

[Vet Sustain provide a wealth of useful sustainability resources for veterinary teams](#)

[BVA's Green Team Vet resource page signposts to sustainability resources for veterinary teams](#)

[The Greener veterinary practice checklist outlines points a veterinary practice may consider to become more sustainable](#)

[VDS webinars include the BVA, Vet Sustain and VDS Greener Veterinary Practice Webinar series from 2022](#)

[Vet Sustain's environmental sustainability policy guide](#)

[The Veterinary Carbon Calculator is bespoke for veterinary practice use, to help you compute the carbon footprint of your practice](#)

[SME climate hub and the UK Business Climate Hub provide free tools and resources to help businesses reduce emissions.](#)

[Investors in the Environment is an environmental accreditation scheme which many veterinary organisations work with to improve their environmental impacts](#)

[RCVS Practice Standard Scheme offers an additional Sustainability award, the criteria for which can be found in the modules](#)



PARAGON VETS

By David Black, Managing Director

Our sustainability journey did not start as a Eureka moment, but more a gradual awareness of the issues the planet is facing and our role as trusted advocates.

I was initially focussed on the food and farming aspects of climate change and sustainability, and was a founding Director of Vet Sustain, so our colleagues knew they always had support from our leadership team. We really accelerated our journey from 2020, when we were in the midst the Covid-19 lock downs and using single use PPE at an alarming rate. It struck us how wasteful, albeit necessary, it was and how reliant we are on single use plastics in veterinary medicine. Our Board decided to discuss ways Paragon could formalise a sustainability plan.

We understood we needed colleagues across the practice to engage, and this couldn't be a "top-down" approach. Laura Binnie (see page 17) was an extremely enthusiastic individual in the team, so she was asked to take the lead and form a Green Group. Our team utilised the Vet Sustain Greener Veterinary Practice Checklist as a starting point, and created a 'roadmap to sustainability' by looking at everything that had a carbon footprint in our business and considering ways we could reduce it. We started with the 'easy wins', such as switching to LED light bulbs, using 'switch off' stickers, and increasing the number and labelling of recycling bins. We then tackled the larger areas of our impact such as isoflurane use, procurement, electricity and heating, water usage, travel, waste management, and biodiversity around our sites. We're really proud of all of Paragon's sustainability achievements

to date, including our multiple sustainability awards. We're now committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2030 (by at least scope 1 and 2) and we have made our commitment to the SME Climate Hub and have joined the 'Race to Zero'.

Inevitably, in a busy practice with individuals focussing on their own work, be it clinical or management, it can be difficult to prioritise reducing carbon emissions. We knew we had to embed a culture around sustainability across the practice – this doesn't happen overnight and is still evolving now. Communication, and 'taking everyone along on the journey' is key, but so are behaviours and setting an example. Our Directors and Leads spend time with their teams letting everyone know what's happening, how it will be achieved, and importantly empowering everyone to take initiative and come up with ideas. Sustainability is on the agenda of all our meetings as a standing item and we talk about it at practice meetings. We also updated our team's six agreed values, and 'working sustainably' is now firmly considered as a theme that runs through all our values and work.





SMALL WORLD VETS

By Phill Elliott, Founder

've been heavily involved in conservation and environmental campaigning all my life, so sustainability was always going to be a fundamental part of our ethos. We are committed to achieving net zero by 2030, and would ideally like to go further and become carbon negative (ie remove more emissions than we produce).

Sustainability informs every decision we make. We renovated a dilapidated property for our practice premises, so were able to get insulation and energy efficiency measures installed from the start, and we opted for a renewable energy company. We actively drive down consumption/waste of resources, promote recycling, and use low-flow anaesthesia to reduce iso/O₂ use. We inform suppliers of our 'preferred status' for those with a robust and genuine environmental policy, and provide a packet of wildflower seeds with every condolence card we send. We've generated over £15,000 for environmental projects by making donations an integral part of our business plan, sponsored carbon offsetting for a local school pupil

project, and we make monthly offsetting contributions for every staff member through Ecologi. Now that it's possible to measure emissions more accurately, we've also started to monitor our carbon footprint, though we continue to reduce our impacts even when they aren't easy to quantify.

In 2023, we introduced two innovative new health plans, including one for 'Pet & Planet'. Both new plans include unlimited consultations, since preventative health care and early interventions will benefit welfare and reduce the environmental footprint of treatment. Our plans also include annual carbon offsetting, a range of discounts, parasite testing and prevention advice, as well as the usual vaccinations. We are proud of this unique approach, which has earned us a lot of attention and an award, and provides clients with a valuable service.

The biggest challenge we faced was bringing staff on board in a busy, often under-staff practice. Not everyone has capacity, simply because of the demands of everyday clinical work which must always be our primary focus. However, everyone find their own way, and the leadership team ensure we provide support for this, such as through relevant CPD. The team also appreciates that their hard work contributes to positive impacts and charitable donations. Our advice for others is to start somewhere, setting SMART goals and focusing on the low hanging fruit to gain momentum, which will help you make a start on the bigger impact actions. Don't get bogged down in 'counting paper clips' – the changes that need to be made are quite intuitive, eg "use less stuff", so everyone can get on and do that!

Finally, don't forget to communicate what you are doing, with each other, with clients, via social media, and in consultations, as many will take note and some may follow. We're excited about the changes we influence, and hopeful that our proudest achievements are yet to come.





Community and profession

All organisations working in the veterinary sector must provide leadership and expertise to drive decarbonisation. Large groups and professional organisations arguably have the greatest potential for influencing impactful change. From membership bodies and major employers to pharmaceutical companies and industry groups, everyone must play their part in ensuring the profession supports the UK's net zero commitments, and industry leaders have a clear responsibility to help drive systemic changes. This should start with efforts to lead by example, putting sustainability at the heart of the organisation's strategy and working to address their own carbon footprint, following the advice given in the 'Team' and 'Four steps to net zero' sections of this report. At the same time, leaders should use their influence to bring wider environmental benefits, and the following tips highlight the fundamental areas we think all organisations should be considering.

Every organisation working in the veterinary sector can support wider efforts to achieve net zero by:

- **Raising awareness and using your influence:** Use your organisation's unique voice, expertise, and reputation to raise awareness of environmental issues and influence others, both within the veterinary sector and the wider community. The veterinary sector is closely involved with many sectors that have a direct impact on the

environment and is well placed to contribute to topical conversations around sustainability, from the pet carbon pawprint, to regenerative farming, to antimicrobial resistance. Teams could consider creating workplace campaigns, as well as using routine conversations to raise awareness of environmental issues they are working to address and the solutions they are putting in place. All organisations should identify how they can best use their voice to amplify and support environmental messages and ensure they are actively engaging in relevant discussions.

- **Providing advice, guidance and resources:** Every organisation in the veterinary sector should work to develop and signpost to environmental advice related to their specific area of work or business. For example, veterinary membership organisations can develop guidance on how to handle specific issues known to affect their own sector, businesses can share resources which support individual sites to calculate and reduce their carbon footprints, and industry groups can ensure environmental best practice is shared and understood. Universities and training providers should also ensure that sustainability is embedded into the curriculum, ensuring the next generation of veterinary professionals are equipped to understand the climate crisis and their role in helping to achieve net zero.



To tackle this truly One Health issue, veterinary organisations must not let competition be a barrier and must be willing to work together on projects and campaigns."

RESOURCES

[Vet Sustain provide a wealth of useful sustainability resources for veterinary organisations](#)

[BVA's Green Team Vet resource page signposts to sustainability resources for veterinary organisations](#)

[BVA blog post showcasing BVA's leadership through #GreenTeamVet](#)

[Over 140 veterinary organisations have demonstrated their commitment to sustainability by joining Investors in the Environment \(iE\)](#)

[The Greener Veterinary Practice Webinar series from 2022 was a collaboration between BVA, Vet Sustain and VDS](#)

[The Greener veterinary practice checklist was developed by Vet Sustain in partnership with BVA, BVNA, SPVS](#)

[The Veterinary Carbon Calculator was developed by Vet Sustain and Investors in the Environment, and supported by BVA, BSAVA, BVNA and SPVS](#)

- **Supporting innovation, research and development:** New technology, practises and knowledge will be vital for achieving net zero. Organisations should consider how they help to develop more environmentally friendly products, services or practises relevant to their area of work, including through provision of data, research or funding. For example, veterinary suppliers could provide data on product emissions, pharmaceutical companies could develop smaller products to reduce waste, major employers could invest and trial new green initiatives, and universities can research and teach veterinary professionals the most sustainable practises. The profession also needs to consider researching and adapting to the consequences of climate change that will already be unavoidable.
- **Demanding change:** Organisations are often in a powerful position to demand change from those they work with, including clients, suppliers, stakeholders and key decision makers. Requesting environmental commitments, products or actions from those they work with will ultimately encourage others to change their systems and consider their own impacts. This is especially powerful if an organisation is likely to purchase high volumes of products, provides a client with a highly valued service, or a trusted source of advice. Even making simple, low level requests can reinforce pro-environmental messaging and encourage changes over time. Professional organisations can also act as the voice of their membership to lobby for change from Government and other decision makers.
- **Collaborating:** Climate change knows no boundaries, and there will be many complexities and uncertainties in a net zero future which can only be navigated with respectful collaboration, sensitivity to true inclusiveness, and the humility to continually learn. To tackle this truly One Health issue, organisations must not let competition be a barrier and must be willing to work together on projects and campaigns, to find solutions and share knowledge, resources, and recognition, within and outside the veterinary sector, for the benefit of all.



FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY

By Jane Clark, Director of Veterinary Services, FSA

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is a rather different veterinary workplace and, as with all UK government departments, we have already have committed to taking actions to reduce our impact on the environment (see Greening Government Commitments). At FSA, we wanted to go beyond these requirements, because we can also use the policy and regulatory work that we do as a vehicle to make an even more positive impact on the planet.

When considering our own carbon footprint, we knew that it was going to be challenging to bring all team members on board in such a large organisation, but we are passionate about what we do and know that, in making a difference, everyone has a role to play. So we developed a clear sustainability strategy, putting this at the heart of what we do to achieve our shared goals.

We set up a Climate and Environment Action Group – a staff network of volunteers – to support colleagues in each business area to embed a greener working culture. This group has already helped to increase awareness across FSA. A major focus area for us has been reducing our emissions linked to staff travel: we've set targets for ourselves, working to reduce the number of business miles travelled by 50%, reduce distance travelled by domestic flights by 20% and switch all leased cars to ultra-low emissions vehicles by 2027. And we need to measure and track progress against these targets, so we ensure all journeys, and their associated carbon footprint, are tracked through our booking systems. We've already made a huge impact by working with our teams to support and encourage remote virtual working from home, and, for our field teams, we are using new technologies to enable remote audit of abattoirs, which we use to follow up the essential in-person visits.

In addition to our own carbon footprint, we recognised that, as a regulator, we have the power to make widespread changes through the policies we create.

We have therefore enshrined environmental sustainability in our core pillars for achieving our fundamental mission of food you can trust, stating that this means:

- Food is safe
- Food is what it says it is
- Food is healthier and more sustainable

We've worked on a number of projects to support this, including providing advice and support for community cooking and foodbanks, supporting food to be redistributed rather than wasted. A major win was gaining authorisation of 3-nitrooxypropanol (3-NOP), a new and innovative feed additive, designed to inhibit methane emissions in ruminants, with the potential to contribute to the UK's net zero ambitions and wider agricultural decarbonisation goals.

My advice for any organisation working to reduce their carbon footprint is to use this report as a guide and follow the four steps to net zero. Remember to start with something simple, as it really can be quite straightforward to be effective and one step can quickly lead to another. Sustainability initiatives can also bring many benefits to your team, and we're proud that our work has positively contributed to our workplace culture, helping us to win workplace wellbeing awards.





SURREY VET SCHOOL

By Hannah Davies, Lecturer and Dr Catherine Finnegan, Lecturer

It was hard to know exactly where to start in our sustainability journey at Surrey Vet School, but we knew we had an opportunity to make positive changes on campus and create long term systemic change by educating vet students to act more sustainably. The University of Surrey is committed to achieving net zero for scopes 1 and 2 by 2030, and the RCVS updated their day one competences to include sustainability in 2019, both of which acted as a driver for us to review our sustainability credentials.

We decided to start by bringing like-minded people together to share ideas, including staff and students. There are some particularly passionate individuals within the school who helped to drive this work, setting up a sustainability working group to consider actions we could take. They helped to run switch off campaigns, make changes to our procurement in favour of sustainable products, and consider how we can drive sustainable initiatives within the school.

Our student Veterinary Society created a lovely garden on campus with a diverse range of plants and flowers, and will soon provide vegetables for students to harvest.

As part of a wider university curriculum review, we were tasked to embed 'five pillars' into our curriculum, including student employability, their resourcefulness and resilience, global and cultural capabilities, sustainability awareness, and digital capabilities. To provide an innovative answer to addressing these five pillars as well as the changing needs of the profession, we redesigned a 4th year module to put One Health and Sustainability at its core. This new module involves a sustainability audit exercise where students review the sustainability initiatives occurring in some of our partner veterinary practices using the Investors in the Environment and Vet Sustain Greener Veterinary Practice frameworks. This exercise provides a fantastic opportunity to bring sustainability principles to our veterinary students in a tangible and authentic way. We hope this will create a generation of vets with the knowledge and skills to work more sustainably, building a more resilient future workforce. We were proud to be awarded the University of Surrey's "Environmental improvement award", for encouraging students to act sustainably in the workforce, as well as winning a Bronze Award in the Green impact awards.

Our advice to any organisation considering how to best influence their community is to start small, ensure you consider your own carbon footprint, and find others who care. For universities, the Vet Sustain curriculum working group is an excellent place to meet passionate representatives from UK Vet Schools. We also recommend getting representatives from your community involved, as we found including students highlighted the strength of their support for sustainability initiatives, giving us inspiration to keep working for these important changes.





VET.CT

By Liz Barton, Head of Communications

From the outset, VET.CT was designed to provide veterinary colleagues with accurate, helpful specialist input, providing clinical reassurance and support. As one of the first providers of remote specialist veterinary image reporting, we work to increase accessibility to advanced imaging and specialist care, bringing specialists into local practices without the carbon footprint of travel. We've always been mindful of the company's impact on the environment, people and animals, and as the company grows globally, we're working to ensure sustainability is a guiding influence for everything we do.

The challenge of tackling climate change can feel overwhelming. Rather than trying to 'do it all', we found it helpful to develop a structure and focus, which encourages continuous, stepwise improvement. Forming a sustainability working group was instrumental to our progress, bringing together wide-ranging expertise and perspectives for discussion, setting monthly company-wide focus areas, and creating resources to continuously improve our collective sustainability. We started by introducing office recycling bins, which developed into more comprehensive recycling policies that have reduced our landfill waste by over 70%. We focussed on sustainable materials when moving offices and chose local suppliers with good environmental credentials, to help reduce emissions from our building. We also recently completed our first carbon emissions report to benchmark our work, going above and beyond statutory requirements for carbon emissions reporting. We're now proud to be working towards becoming a certified [B Corporation](#) to provide external verification of our commitments.

We know taking care of people, patients and the planet is incredibly important to our team and the wider veterinary community. We want to be an example of how businesses can do this well, acting as a force for good within and beyond the veterinary industry. In 2023, we completed an

Environment, Social and Governance sustainability assessment and received a huge number of responses, which gave us valuable insights into the priorities of our team and wider community. A key priority is to support education and training across the veterinary sector, so we've partnered with [Vet Sustain](#) and [Vet Times](#) to support their sustainability education initiatives. We also donate used computer equipment to the [Turing Trust](#), for refurbishment and redistribution to support education programmes in underprivileged communities, support charities such as [Wildlife Vets International](#), and provide free [specialist advice for rescued sea turtles](#). We're always exploring how we can improve sustainability and positively impact people in the veterinary community and beyond, animals, and the planet through initiatives around emissions, waste and water use.


Our advice is to start small. Break down the challenge into manageable steps so it doesn't feel as overwhelming, and regularly look back at how far you've come. Explore the wide range of resources available, including those listed in this report, and learn from others in the sector – from case studies of small businesses to detailed corporate sustainability reports, there are lots of examples to learn from. Finally, ensure you engage with everyone you work with, including your team, clients and other stakeholders, as reaching out to your community is essential for determining priorities, generating ideas, and implementing change.





Four steps to net zero

There is a clear role for all individuals, teams and communities in veterinary workplaces to play in supporting the goal of reaching net zero. Everyone will be at different places on their journey, and will need their own specific plan, but these four steps work well as a guide for anyone wanting to take significant action to reduce their carbon footprint.



These steps are based on information gathered from the [Science Based Targets Initiative](#), [IEMA Pathways to Net Zero](#), and this research paper on [The path to Net Zero carbon emissions for veterinary practice](#).

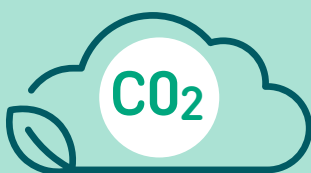


Step 1: Pledge

Start by making a clear commitment to sustainability. A change in mindset will be essential to make sure sustainability is considered in all decision making processes. Making a clear commitment is the first step to ensuring positive choices for the environment become the norm.

Everyone working in a veterinary workplace should understand climate change and believe their actions will contribute to reducing emissions, as individuals, team members, and part of the wider community. For many individuals the commitment will simply be a personal goal, but making formal pledges and/or informing others of this decision can help to increase the level of commitment.

Within workplaces, clear commitments from leadership are particularly important to embed sustainability goals in company culture. The organisation's strategy and purpose should also be reviewed to ensure it aligns with sustainability commitments, to avoid creating conflict when considering budgets, stakeholders and targets. Pledges can be demonstrated through an [environmental policy](#) and by setting specific goals.



What targets should I set?

Where possible, individuals and organisations should set annual, near-term (5–10 year) and long-term goals to reach net zero, in line with science-based targets to reduce emissions by:



Science-based targets for the UK are to achieve a 43% reduction by 2030, and net zero (90% reduction as a minimum) across all scopes by 2050.

The Science Based Targets Initiative

sets key requirements for businesses to align with the 1.5°C pathway of the Paris Agreement, recommending a 50% reduction in emissions by 2030 and 90% by 2050, with remaining emissions offset by carbon credits.

Find out more at sciencebasedtargets.org

2

Step 2: Plan

To fulfil any commitment to sustainability, a realistic action plan needs to be developed to reduce and mitigate environmental impacts.

A useful starting place for individuals and teams is to complete a carbon footprint calculation, to identify and quantify the emissions which need to be reduced. This can be calculated using published data, or with the support of a carbon calculator. There are different calculators available online, from more generic or simplistic tools, to those that can provide a more in-depth overview. Individuals can use personal footprint calculators such as [this one from WWF](#), and veterinary teams may wish to consider a more detailed tool such as the [UK Veterinary Carbon Calculator](#), which has been designed specifically for veterinary practices.

Once calculated, a carbon footprint can be used to identify potential emission “hotspots”, which can then be used to develop a personal or team action plan. It’s important to consider both the size of the potential emissions reduction, and how easy it is to make an impact quickly. For individuals, focussing on improving knowledge and becoming carbon literate is often a vital first step.

Many workplaces will usually find the highest proportion of emissions will come from Scope 3²² (see box on emissions to consider), but it may be easier to initially focus on changes which are more directly under the team’s control. Wherever they start, teams should make a plan for dealing with all their associated emissions, including both near-term and long term goals, with annual targets which are consistent with meeting these. Shorter term goals should be planned in detail, including costings, but longer term pledges can be more generic for now. The plan should also acknowledge where there will need to be systemic changes which are outside of the organisations control, eg the greening of the national grid.

If it is not yet possible to commit to clear, science based goals, it is possible for every workplace to start their journey to net zero immediately by measuring annual use of products or services and choosing lower carbon alternatives wherever possible. Teams can also benefit from seeking expert support from consultants or schemes such as [Investors in the Environment](#).

What emissions do workplaces need to consider?

For any workplace, there are three scopes of emissions that must be considered in the carbon footprint and action plan:

- **Scope 1:** Emissions produced on site, eg gas/oil heating, anaesthetic gases, combustion engines vehicles owned and used by the business.
- **Scope 2:** Emissions from purchased energy, typically electricity purchased from the grid.
- **Scope 3:** All other indirect emissions, both within your business operational bounds, such as use of products and services, waste, water, travel, medical supplies, and those embodied in your supply chains.

The data for scope 1 & 2 emissions can usually be sourced easily from energy bills, invoices etc. Scope 3 emissions can be more challenging to calculate fully, since emissions factors for products and services are not always easily available. Looking forward, the wider industry should provide more accessible data on emissions to enable veterinary teams to accurately assess their influence.

VS Veterinary Carbon Calculator

This bespoke tool helps you to compute the carbon footprint of your veterinary practice, enabling you to take action to reduce your impact on the environment.

BVA members can save 33% off the purchase price. Access your code in our [member portal](#).

Find out more at vetsustain.org



²² For example UN Global Compact Network UK unglobalcompact.org.uk/scope-3-emissions/

3

Step 3: Proceed

Once a plan has been created, it needs to be executed, with immediate action taken towards achieving those targets.

Begin by focusing on the areas identified as having the potential in which to make the greatest immediate impact. These will vary with individuals, teams and workplaces, but some common examples are:

- **Energy:** Switching to a green energy provider can significantly reduce your carbon footprint with very little effort required, and can save money. Use a green energy comparison site to investigate such as [Green Energy Switch](#) or [Big Clean Switch](#).
- **Travel:** Aim to make informed and sustainable travel choices wherever possible, and encourage colleagues and clients to do the same. This includes working to reduce the number and/or length of journeys made, and choosing the most sustainable options for the rest. Increasing active travel brings cost savings and health benefits for individuals, as well as for teams and organisations, creating an effective [travel policy](#) can make a significant impact and potentially save time and money.
- **Waste:** Perform a waste audit to identify commonly disposed of items and ensure everything is being segregated correctly. Work to reduce waste generated wherever possible by switching to reusable options. Research which remaining items can be recycled, and encourage best practise by communicating this with colleagues, such as through clear bins and signage. In clinical practice, aim to reduce the volume of incinerated clinical waste, which uses more energy and costs more money. See the [BVA Handling veterinary waste guidance posters](#) and the [In Practice article on How to manage healthcare waste and reduce its environmental impact](#).
- **Anaesthetic gases:** A significant contributor to carbon emissions in clinical practice, aim to avoid nitrous oxide, choose anaesthetic protocols carefully and use lower-flow techniques. For more information, read this article on [reducing anaesthetic gas for environmental benefit](#).

It's also important to continually assess progress and review the plan to ensure it remains impactful and achievable. Build in regular opportunities to reflect on successes and challenges, adapting the plan accordingly to stay on target or even set more ambitious goals.

Carbon offsetting

Carbon offsetting is sometimes used as a way to balance emissions, by investing in projects which take the equivalent amount of carbon out of the atmosphere, such as forestry or renewable energy sources. It is not an alternative to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Offsets may involve projects which avoid future emissions or those which actively remove carbon from the atmosphere. These must never be used as a substitute for reducing emissions, so it's vital workplaces primarily reduce their carbon footprint and have a plan to reduce it further, investing time and money into their action plan in the first instance, whilst potentially considering offsets as additional measures.

It is likely that many organisations will need to invest in carbon removals to eventually achieve net zero, but this should only be considered as a solution for residual emissions which cannot be avoided. Offsetting needs to be done carefully as it can have many ethical dimensions to consider. You should only invest in projects that are verified and accredited by the world's leading carbon registries, such as the Gold Standard and The United Nations. This ensures you can trust that your emissions are being offset and are delivering positive environmental impacts. You should also work closely with a reputable provider to choose offsets that closely align with your business goals and values.



Step 4: Publish

It's important to monitor and publish updates, to celebrate achievements, realise all of the benefits, and inspire others to do the same.

This could be as simple as notifying the team of your successes and challenges, so they are all aware of the improvements you have made and next steps for further reduction. Organisations should also consider reporting their progress publicly, to improve transparency and trust from external sources. It's helpful to be open about where there is still a need to improve, but also proudly highlight any progress made. Teams may also benefit from formally committing to the [Science Based Targets Initiative](#) or signing up to an accreditation scheme to provide external validation to their claims.

Veterinary organisation should also use publishing their progress as an opportunity to discuss sustainability with clients and stakeholders, including the importance of preventative health care or regenerative farming. In most situations, measures to improve animal welfare are likely to reduce the need for veterinary intervention and associated emissions. For example, avoiding overfeeding companion animals will help to maintain a healthy weight, improving their health and welfare and reducing the amount of food needing to be produced. For production animals, encouraging farmers to support [sustainable welfare-friendly agriculture](#) can reduce their on-farm emissions, especially if consumers are encouraged to eat [#LessAndBetter](#) animal products.

RESOURCES

[Vet Sustain provide a wealth of useful sustainability resources for veterinary teams](#)

[BVA's Green Team Vet resource page signposts to sustainability resources for veterinary teams](#)

[The Veterinary Carbon Calculator is bespoke for veterinary practice use, to help you compute the carbon footprint of your practice](#)

[The Greener veterinary practice checklist outlines points a veterinary practice may consider to become more sustainable](#)

[SME climate hub and the UK Business Climate Hub provide free tools and resources to help businesses reduce emissions.](#)

[The Race to Zero is the world's largest coalition of non-state actors taking immediate action to halve global emissions by 2030 and runs several initiatives veterinary teams can sign up to.](#)

[Investors in the Environment is an environmental accreditation scheme which many veterinary organisations work with to improve their environmental impacts](#)

[Science-based targets network provides science-based advice, guidance and targets for companies wanting to achieving net zero](#)

[Article by Watson *et al* 2023 on The path to Net Zero carbon emissions for veterinary practice](#)

4 steps to net zero



Pledge

your commitment to environmental sustainability



Plan

how to reduce emissions to zero



Proceed

with immediate actions to reduce emissions



Publish

your successes to monitor progress and inspire others





Final thoughts

Veterinary professionals clearly understand the importance of, and care about environmentally sustainability, and there are strong ethical, business, and One Health reasons why veterinary workplaces must take action towards achieving net zero. Many have already made significant progress, but there is more work to do.

Our vision is for a veterinary sector in 2050 that has adapted to support the UK's net zero targets, is trusted on mitigating its own carbon footprint, and leading as a strong advocate for environmental sustainability, and its benefits to human and animal health and wellbeing.

This report was designed to provide motivation to take action, as well as useful resources and a path to follow. No matter where individuals, teams or workplace are starting from, we hope this helps to empower and inspire sustainability action, and to help us achieve this vision for the future of our profession and planet.

Discover the Veterinary Carbon Calculator



vetsustain.org/shop



As the largest membership community for the veterinary profession in the UK, BVA champions, supports, and empowers more than 19,000 vets of all ages, stages, and disciplines.

We're working hard to make sure that you feel encouraged and valued in your work, that you're empowered to thrive both personally and professionally, and that your expertise is heard and respected by the people shaping our national policies.

This work is only possible because of the size, strength, and passion of our community. In other words, we can only do this because of you.

Thank you

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