

## UC'S NEW CLIMATE ACTION GOALS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

In recognition of the need for an urgent, coordinated response to the climate crisis, the University of California updated its Sustainable Practices Policy in July 2023 with stronger climate action goals.

These new goals will accelerate the University's transition away from fossil fuels across all 10 campuses and six academic health centers by committing the University to:

- Prioritizing direct reductions of greenhouse gas emissions at all UC locations
- Limiting the use of carbon offsets
- Incorporating transportation and waste-related emissions in UC's reduction targets
- Tailoring decarbonization plans to the specific circumstances of UC locations
- Reflecting the values of anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion in UC climate actions
- Aligning the University of California's climate action plans with the net-zero carbon pollution goals set by the state of California

These new, stronger goals build on UC's already significant achievements in reducing its carbon emissions and playing a lead role within California to address the climate crisis through research, education and public service.

### WHY DID UC REVISE ITS CLIMATE ACTION GOALS?

Climate experts across UC recognize that the world needs to take decisive action to cut greenhouse gas emissions. The new climate action goals reflect that stance and are based on the best current science. They build on the momentum of UC's carbon neutrality efforts while putting the University on a path for urgent, direct reduction of carbon emissions across its campuses and medical centers.

### HOW DO UC'S NEW CLIMATE ACTION GOALS ALIGN WITH STATE GOALS?

Last year, California adopted [AB-1279](#), setting aggressive new emission reduction targets, and [released the world's first plan](#) to achieve net-zero carbon pollution by 2045. The emission targets outlined in UC's climate action goals mirror the state's ambitious goals: By 2045, UC will slash 90 percent of its carbon emissions, based on 2019 levels. Any residual GHG emissions will be negated through investments in carbon removal projects.

### WHO WAS INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING UC'S NEW CLIMATE ACTION GOALS?

UC climate experts, sustainability officers and other campus leaders developed the new goals over a months' long process that included public forums and other avenues for input from faculty, students and staff. The new goals were unanimously endorsed by campus vice chancellors for Administration, chief operating officers for the academic health centers and the faculty and student representatives on the Systemwide Sustainability Steering Committee. University of California President Michael Drake, M.D.,

approved the revised policy in July 2023.

## WHAT IS UC ALREADY DOING TO CUT CARBON EMISSIONS?

For the past decade, UC has been a model for universities across the country for its innovative efforts to transition to clean, carbon-free electricity, enact energy efficiencies and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Highlights include:

- **Carbon emissions:** UC has reduced its systemwide direct and purchased electricity-related greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent since 2009, even as the University has experienced significant growth.
- **Energy efficiency:** Campus teams have completed over 1,100 projects, saving the University more than \$400M in energy costs.
- **UC's Clean Power Program:** Seven campuses are directly supplied by UC's own electricity company, which has been providing carbon-free electricity since 2019.
- **On-campus solar projects:** UC has installed over 100 separate solar projects across its campuses — a visible and cost-effective part of UC's commitment to renewable energy.
- **Off-campus renewable energy purchases:** UC has signed over 195 MWs of utility-scale solar and wind power purchase agreements to support campus electrification — enough wind and solar power to meet the energy needs for 30K homes.
- **Biomethane as a transition fuel:** UC is the largest voluntary buyer of biomethane (methane from landfills and food waste) in the country. Beginning in 2025, 20 percent of the fossil gas currently used on our campuses will be replaced with zero-carbon biomethane and this centrally procured supply will sunset by 2040.
- **National recognition:** UC has been at the top of the U.S. EPA's Green Power Leadership list for colleges and universities since 2017 because of its leadership in energy efficiency and the transition to clean, carbon-free electricity.

## DO THE NEW CLIMATE GOALS AFFECT UC'S PLAN TO ACHIEVE CARBON NEUTRALITY BY 2025?

The new climate action goals supersede UC's carbon neutrality goal, which was set 10 years ago as part of the Carbon Neutrality Initiative (CNI). UC would have needed to rely heavily on purchased carbon offsets to achieve its 2025 target. In line with the best current science, the new climate goals prioritize direct reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

## WHY IS UC LIMITING THE USE OF CARBON OFFSETS?

The University would have needed to purchase voluntary carbon offset credits for more than half of its emission reductions to achieve the 2025 carbon neutrality goal, at a cost of \$20-\$30M per year. Under the new goals, UC will now use those funds to support campus efforts to reduce carbon emissions. That kind of direct action reflects the current science about the need for urgent reductions in greenhouse gases.

### HAS THE CARBON NEUTRALITY INITIATIVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL?

Yes. Over the past decade, CNI has been a remarkable catalyst for uniting the entire UC system around shared climate goals, such as training future generations of environmental leaders and harnessing UC's powerful research enterprise to finding solutions to the climate crisis. Under CNI, UC made significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. UC is proud of what's been accomplished and is building on all those successes. The new climate action goals further that leadership position by setting the entire University on a trajectory for full decarbonization.

### WHAT EMISSION TARGETS ARE SET UNDER THE NEW GOALS?

UC locations are expected to reduce total greenhouse gas emissions by 90 percent by 2045, with 2019 emission levels as a baseline, and negate any residual GHG emissions through investments in carbon removal projects. By January 1, 2025, campuses are expected to set progressively ambitious interim direct (scope 1) emission reduction targets for 2030, 2035 and 2040. By January 1, 2026, campuses will adopt new climate action plans that lay out their approach for meeting those targets.

### WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES TO CUTTING UC'S REMAINING CARBON EMISSIONS?

UC uses a lot of natural gas on its campuses, especially in its combined heat and power plants. Combustion of natural gas accounts for 80 percent of UC's remaining carbon emissions. State-funded decarbonization studies are already underway at all campuses and academic health centers that will inform strategies, targets and location-specific climate action plans for addressing these emissions.

### NOW THAT NEW CLIMATE ACTION GOALS HAVE BEEN SET, WHAT COMES NEXT?

Under the new policy, UC campuses and academic health centers are expected to fully decarbonize no later than 2045. Decarbonization studies will be complete for all UC locations by the summer of 2024. Based on those findings, UC locations will set interim emission reduction targets and adopt new greenhouse gas reduction plans for meeting those targets by Jan. 2026. The transition to clean energy sources is already underway across UC, and leaders expect that several UC campuses will achieve decarbonization well ahead of the timetable. UC Davis, for example, just published their draft [Fossil Fuel-Free Pathway Plan](#) with specific plans to hit the 90 percent reduction goal by 2040.

### WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE AND TRACK UC'S PROGRESS?

UC has a wealth of resources for getting involved and staying informed:

- See details on the new climate action goals in [UC's Sustainable Practices Policy](#) (PDF).
- Track UC's progress through its [annual sustainability report](#).
- Find campus-specific information via campus sustainability websites. You can find links here: <https://ucop.edu/sustainability/>