



**C**arbon is in every living thing. When plants and animals die, decomposers break them down. The carbon is released as carbon dioxide.

Millions of years ago, some plants became buried. They didn't decompose, so the carbon in them was never released. After many years they turned into the coal, oil, and natural gas we know today as fossil fuels.

Every time fossil fuels are burned to provide energy to get things moving (fuel for the car), to make things work (produce electricity), or to heat our homes, the carbon in them is released.

## Your Carbon Footprint

is a measure of the greenhouse gas from your daily energy use.

Reduce your energy use and shrink your carbon footprint.

## What happens to carbon dioxide from burning fossil fuels?



It goes into Earth's atmosphere, where carbon dioxide naturally exists already. It can stay there for a very long time—a thousand years—before it is taken up and used by plants in photosynthesis. We're adding carbon dioxide faster than it is being used, so the amount of carbon dioxide in Earth's atmosphere is increasing. The result is a changing climate.



We all need carbon!

### It's an element in every living thing.

Rocks and minerals made of fossilized animals and plants have carbon in them.  
There's carbon in the foods we eat.  
And there's carbon in you, too!

### For more information

*The Down-to-Earth Guide to Global Warming* by Laurie David and Cambria Gordon (Orchard Books, Scholastic Inc., New York, 2007)

*The Everything Kids' Environment Book* by Sheri Amsel (Adams Media, Avon, Massachusetts, 2007)

*50 Simple Things Kids Can Do to Save the Earth* by The Earthworks Group (Scholastic Inc., New York, 1990)

*Journey for the Planet: a Kid's Five Week Adventure to Create an Earth-friendly Life* by David Gershon (Empowerment Institute, Woodstock, NY, 2007)

*The Live Earth Global Warming Survival Handbook* by David de Rothschild (Rodale Books, New York, 2007)