



Protecting the
environment and
responding to
climate change



UPU

UNIVERSAL
POSTAL
UNION

Created in 1874, the Universal Postal Union is an intergovernmental organization of 192 member countries. It is also the United Nations specialized agency for international postal services since 1948. The UPU is the main forum for cooperation among governments, Posts and other postal sector stakeholders. The organization's mission is to develop social, cultural and business communication between people through effective postal services. It also plays a role in constantly modernizing such services.

Greening the Post

With more than 800,000 post offices over the world, the postal sector operates the largest physical distribution network on the planet. Thanks to its physical, electronic and financial dimensions, the network offers mail and parcel services, as well as financial, electronic and logistics services. Some 1 million motorized vehicles and countless airplanes, covering billions of kilometres every year, are used daily to deliver the mail. What's more, the post offices and 5.5 million postal employees consume electricity, water and paper, which all have an impact on the environment.

Stakeholders of the postal sector are working to find ways to reduce this impact. Many Posts already use electric vehicles, while others have rationalized delivery routes, established energy budgets or made their buildings more environmentally friendly.

For its part, the UPU has been committed to protecting the environment for many years. The group "Environment and Sustainable Development" has undertaken many activities to better share knowledge, resources and best practices among member countries. In addition, sub-groups are studying how the postal sector could better utilize renewable energies; how to promote the use of alternative vehicles for mail delivery and how it could offset green gas emissions in financing postal-related projects on the field.

What the UPU does

Promoting the postal sector's sustainable development will be an important part of the UPU's world postal strategy for 2013-2016; and developing the sector in a sustainable way means paying attention to the impact of postal activities on the environment and climate change.

On this issue the UPU works closely with its member countries, its restricted unions and international and UN organizations. Since 2008 the Union boosted its relations with the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) with new partnerships. This will help the UPU to improve its inventories of greenhouse gas emissions produced by the postal sector and help it assist designated operators in reducing the impact of their postal activities on the environment.

The sector's footprint

The UPU's global inventories of greenhouse gas emissions produced by Posts worldwide are an important step in the response against climate change.

133 countries have already provided the necessary data to the UPU to produce its third inventory (2010) and more are expected to follow suit. The aim in collecting this data is to analyse the main sources of greenhouse gas emissions produced by Posts (depending on geographical locations, country's level of development, area, type of activities, etc.). A simplified guide is available to assist countries with little experience in preparing an inventory of their carbon footprint and in providing the necessary information to measure greenhouse gas emissions.

The UPU uses its own tool, developed based on recommendations made by UNEP and the

Greenhouse Gas Protocol Initiative (GHG Protocol) to capture Post's data and produce a map of their greenhouse gas emissions. The UPU announced the results of the third inventory of the global postal sector's carbon footprint: at least 56.5 million tons CO_{2eq} were emitted in 2010.

The results will enable the UPU to develop a range of measures, adapted to different types of countries, to help Posts reduce their carbon footprint. In industrialized countries, results indicate that emphasis should be placed on using transportation that pollutes less. In developing countries, the focus should be on energy efficient in the buildings, given that coal is often used to produce electricity and that buildings are dated. The UPU's aim is to encourage the transfer of technology and know-how to help developing and least developed countries put in place measures designed to reduce their environmental impact.

Furthermore, to ensure its work is effective in the field, the UPU has established a worldwide network of national correspondents for sustainable development. Regular regional seminars enable them to benefit from the knowledge of experts and learn about best practices worldwide, especially those relating to climate change. Between 2009 and 2012, five seminars were organized: in Thailand and Vietnam for the Asia-Pacific region; in Costa Rica for the Americas; and in Senegal and Cameroon for Africa. More of these seminars will be organized to help each region define its own sustainable development action plan and evaluate the progress made.

Summary

- Postal vehicles and buildings worldwide released at least 56.5 million tons CO_{2eq} in 2010.

- The United Nations Environment Programme estimates total annual worldwide greenhouse gas emissions at 38 million tons, meaning that postal operations produce 0.15% of these emissions
- Broken down by region, the 56.5 million tons are generated as follows: Western Europe (57%), Americas (22.5%), Southern Asia and Oceania (16%), Eastern Europe and Northern Asia (3%), and Africa (1.5%).



Some French postal workers use electric quads to deliver the mail
(Photo: La Poste, France)

Charity begins at home...

To showcase sustainable development activities, the International Bureau, the UPU headquarters in Bern, has joined the initiative "Sustainable United Nations", with the goal of becoming a climate neutral organization. It has established inventories of the greenhouse gas emissions it produces. In 2009, the International Bureau generated 1'400 tons of CO_{2eq} – which shows a reduction of –7% compared to 2008. Energy consumption accounts for 45% of these emissions, while official travel represents 30% and staff commuting, 24%. The data has been given to the UN Environment Management Group, which presents each year the results concerning all UN agencies, funds and programmes to the Chief Executive Board.

A UNEP-led training session on green purchasing was given to staff in June 2009 and it is already helping the UPU to lessen the environmental impact of its activities at headquarters and in the field. The International Bureau building façade was renovated to reduce energy consumption. The UPU also developed a policy to ensure that staff travelling on missions uses the most ecological means of transportation, if they cannot use the videoconferencing system available at the International Bureau. This, combined with other activities, will help make the UPU more climate neutral and progress towards its reduction target: –20% by 2012 compared to 2008.

Leading by example

Having long recognized the impact of their activities on the environment and climate change, many Posts are trying to be more ecological. Here's an overview of what some Posts are doing.



Improving vehicle performance

- Dutch operator TNT uses more than 100 hybrid or electric vehicles throughout the world.
- The United States Postal Service (USPS) currently uses 43 electric vehicles and 300 vehicles powered by compressed natural gas. In one year, the USPS has increased its usage of alternative fuel by 68%.
- Swiss Post uses 250 electric scooters and 140 vehicles powered by natural gas to deliver the mail, making its fleet the largest in Switzerland. Natural gas-powered vehicles produce 10% fewer carbon emissions than those powered by diesel engines, which results in a reduction of 59 tons of CO₂ per year.

- Japan Post intends to progressively replace its 22,000 vehicles with electric ones.

- The Belgian Post installed solar panels on the roof of its mail processing center in Gand. They produce 400,000 kilowatt-hour a year, representing 10% of the facility's electricity needs.

- DHL is testing a deep-sea cargo ship equipped with a giant sail to transport freight between Germany and Venezuela. Depending on the wind's force, fuel costs could be cut by 10% to 35%.

- Chronopost, the French Post subsidiary, has signed a charter to voluntarily reduce its carbon emissions by road transport. To meet its goals, Chronopost will modernize its fleet and train its drivers on fuel-efficient driving.

Improving building efficiency

- To save energy and significantly cut its annual energy consumption by about

5.4 GWh, New Zealand Post uses solar energy and has built new buildings that let in natural light throughout the day.

- DHL's sites and mail processing centres are certified ISO 14001, which guarantees that the environment is respected in the daily management of the buildings. Efforts focus mostly on fuel and electricity consumption.
- The USPS has inaugurated a green roof on one of its main buildings in New York. The roof is expected to reduce the amount of contaminants in storm-water runoff and generate lower heating and air-conditioning bills.

Green purchasing

Some Posts have adopted green-purchasing policies. Environmentally-friendly products, such as recycled paper and parcels made from recycled cardboard, are less harmful for the environment throughout their life cycle (from conception to recycling). Other operators have either added a green tax to products or have made their customers aware of the importance of protecting the environment through dedicated pages on their websites.

- Deutsche Post DHL's GoGreen programme aims to help the operator reduce its carbon footprint for every letter mailed, every container shipped and every square meter of warehouse space used by 30% by 2020.
- Canada Post's website offers a range of green products, and special pages are devoted to nature conservation.
- Swiss Post offers customers the possibility of compensating carbon emissions generated by their mail by opting for a supplement, used to finance projects aimed



The USPS's new green roof in New York

(Photo: USPS)

at halting climate change.

Raising awareness

- More and more Posts are issuing stamps focusing on environment protection and climate change to create awareness of these important issues.
- Through its programme *Linea Verde*, Spain's Correos sells postal products made from recycled materials online. For each item bought, a donation goes to an association that re-timbers zones affected by deforestation. Since the programme was launched in 2000, about 20,000 trees have been planted on 350,000 square metres of land.

For more information on the role of the UPU in protecting the environment and fighting climate change:

www.upu.int/climate_change/en/index.shtml

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