

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Survey Background Information

What is the purpose of the commuter survey?

The commuter survey serves two purposes for the Department of the Interior (Department). First, the survey enables us to assess our progress towards meeting our greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction goal. The Department, along with other federal agencies, is required to periodically inventory GHG emissions from its operations, including employee commuting, per [Executive Order \(EO\) 13693, Planning for Federal Sustainability in the Next Decade](#). Second, the survey allows us to gain feedback from the Department's employees on alternative commuting options and other workplace flexibilities that the Department could offer to reduce commuter emissions in the future.

Who developed the commuter survey?

The commuter survey was developed via a collaboration between the White House's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), the Department of Transportation's (DOT's) Volpe Center, the Department of Energy's (DOE's) Federal Energy Management Program (FEMP), and the General Services Administration (GSA) to help federal agencies calculate their commuting-related GHG emissions, as required.

The survey is used to calculate the GHG emissions associated with federal employee commuting to and from the workplace, allows emissions to be compared across federal agencies, and provides information to inform decisions about how emissions can be reduced in the future.

Who administers the survey?

GSA administers the survey on behalf of the Department.

Survey Invitations

What should I do if I have not received a commuter survey invitation/e-mail?

*If you have not received an e-mail invitation to participate in the commuter survey by October 20, 2015, first check your spam e-mail folder. If you are still unable to find the e-mail, then please contact commutersurvey@gsa.gov. Please **DO NOT** use an e-mail/survey code that was provided to one of your co-workers.*

If I have not received a commuter survey invitation/e-mail, can I complete the survey using the e-mail my co-worker received?

NO. *In order to ensure that only one survey response is received from each employee, the e-mail you will receive will contain a survey link created specifically for you. Please do not send your unique survey link to anyone else, since each link can only be used once to complete the survey.*

If you have not received an e-mail invitation to participate in the commuter survey by October 20, 2015, first check your spam e-mail folder. If you are unable to find the e-mail there, then please contact commutersurvey@gsa.gov.

Completing the Survey

Am I required to complete the survey?

Completion of the employee commuter survey is voluntary. However, we hope each of the Department's employees can take a few minutes of their time to complete the survey, as a higher level of participation results in a more accurate and complete picture of the emissions produced by employee commuting.

If you chose not to respond to the survey, the survey methodology assumes that you drive alone in a car each day and that you drive a distance equivalent to the average number of miles reported by those survey respondents who drove alone in a car.

Why do I have to select my commuting method separately for each day in Questions #4 and #7?

The survey is structured in this manner because some commuters use multiple methods of transportation in a week, or even in the same day. This format allows these commuters to provide a more complete

response. Further, the use of this approach increases the accuracy of the survey results by reducing the number of errors or misunderstandings that can occur when data is being entered. For example, by asking for the daily miles traveled using each method, the survey prevents users from misunderstanding the question and entering weekly mileage by mistake.

How should I answer Questions #4 and #7 if I participate in a “slugging” program?

“Slugging” is a type of informal carpooling. Please select “Carpool” for the days in which “slugging” is used. It does not matter if you are the driver or the passenger.

I was unable to complete the survey in one sitting. Can I still finish it? Do I have to start over from the beginning?

You may return to the survey to finish it at any time during the survey period by following the link that was provided to you in your invitation e-mail. Your responses will be saved for any questions you complete before leaving the survey.

Non-Traditional Work Schedules and Teleworking

I don’t work a traditional Monday through Friday schedule. How do I record distances that I commute on Saturday and Sunday?

While we realize that some Department employees work on weekends, the Department has a very limited ability to make changes to the commuter survey tool itself. The commuter survey tool is administered by GSA, and is used by numerous Departments across the Federal Government. Thus, the tool was structured to ask for commuting patterns for a Monday - Friday schedule to make it easier for most federal employees to complete, since most federal employees are on this traditional work schedule.

However, if your personal work schedule does not conform to this traditional work schedule, please complete the survey in a manner that best reflects the five days during the week that you commute to work. For example, if you commute to work Saturday - Wednesday, please disregard the “Monday,” “Tuesday,” “Wednesday,” “Thursday,” and

“Friday” labels on Questions #4 and #7, and complete the survey based on your commute for your Saturday - Wednesday schedule.

How should an alternative work schedule (AWS), in which I only work every other Friday, be reflected in Questions #4 and #7 of the survey?

Please complete the responses to Questions #4 and #7 to reflect your commuting pattern for last week.

For example, if you are on an AWS and your day off fell on Friday of last week (the week before the survey deployment), please select “N/A: AWS day off (e.g 5-4/9 plan)” for the Friday entry. However, if this was a five day work week for you (your day off was not last week), then please enter your commuting method for each of the five days. The use of this methodology to account for AWS will average out across your bureau/office as well as the Department as a whole.

How should a part-time or other irregular work schedule be reflected in Questions #4 and #7 of the survey?

Please complete the responses to Questions #4 and #7 to reflect your commuting pattern for last week.

For those employees on a part-time or other irregular work schedule, please select “Other” as the “Method of Transportation” and “N/A” for the “# Miles” for any day(s) you didn’t work, and enter your commuting method for each of the remaining days.

I took a sick day or vacation day last week. How should this be reflected in Questions #4 and #7 of the survey?

*Please complete the responses to Questions #4 and #7 to reflect your **normal** commuting pattern; **do not** include vacation or sick days.*

Vacation and sick days are already accounted for in the survey methodology, as discussed in the first FAQ in the “Survey Methodology” section.

I telework on an irregular schedule. How should this be reflected in Questions #4 and #7 of the survey?

If you telework on an irregular basis, you should also complete the responses to Questions #4 and #7 to reflect your commuting pattern for last week.

For example, if you teleworked on one or more days last week (the week before the survey deployment), please select "N/A: Teleworked" for that day(s). If you did not telework any day last week, then please enter your commuting method for each of the five days. The use of this methodology to account for irregular telework will average out across your bureau/office as well as the Department as a whole.

I am a full-time teleworker. How should this be reflected in Questions #4 and #7 of the survey?

If you telework on a full-time basis, you should select "N/A: Teleworked" for each of the five days you worked last week (the week before the survey deployment.)

Individual Response Confidentiality

Will my commuter survey responses be kept confidential?

YES. *The Department **will not** receive individually identifiable data from GSA (the survey administrator). GSA will disassociate all data from the departmental e-mail addresses to which the survey invitations were sent prior to it being provided to the Department. Further, the Department will only report commuter survey information in the aggregate.*

If my commuter survey response is confidential, why does the survey's e-mail invitation contain a unique survey link?

*The e-mail invitation contains a unique survey link solely to ensure that only one survey response is received from each employee. Please be assured that **your response is completely confidential**. The Department will not receive individually identifiable information from GSA, as discussed in the prior FAQ.*

Survey Methodology

How are the results calculated?

The survey calculations follow industry best practices, such as those established by the DOT's Volpe Center, and results are calculated to demonstrate alignment with the EO 13693 requirements and the DOE FEMP Reporting Portal.

For all survey respondents, the commuter survey tool calculates the average distance traveled per day using each transportation method and then multiplies these daily results by 230, the number of working days in a year, to calculate the average distance traveled by each respondent for each transportation method in a year. (While there are a total of 260 weekdays in a year, there are only 230 working days once vacation/sick days and holidays are deducted.)

For survey non-respondents, the commuter survey tool assumes each non-respondent drove alone in a car each day, and s/he drove a distance that is equivalent to the average number of miles driven by all respondents who drove alone in a car. This approach is consistent with industry best practices to address the self-selection bias in which individuals who use alternative methods of transportation (e.g., biking or public transit) are more likely to complete the survey than those who drive alone.

Finally, the commuter survey tool calculates the sum of all of the respondents and non-respondents to arrive at the final results.

If you are interested in more detail on the survey calculations and assumptions and the impact of non-responses, please see the following hyperlinks for more information:

[Calculations and Assumptions](#)

[Non-Response Bias](#)

Individual Survey Results

At the end of the survey, it indicated that my estimated annual emissions are 1.47 MT CO₂e and that this is equivalent to the carbon sequestered by 38 tree seedlings. What does it mean?

The 1.47 figure is an estimate of the amount of greenhouse gases, or GHGs, your annual commute produces. GHGs, such as carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), and nitrous oxide (N₂O) are gases that trap heat in the atmosphere, and are produced by the manufacture of transportation energy sources (such as gasoline and electricity) and the burning of fossil

fuels (such as the use of gasoline and diesel in internal combustion engines.) Each type of GHG has a different global warming potential (GWP.) The survey calculation methodology uses the GWP factor for each type of GHG produced by your particular commuting method to convert the associated emissions to a common unit of measure, or metric tons of CO₂ equivalent (CO₂e.) For additional information on GHGs and their GWP, please visit the [Environmental Protection Agency's \(EPA's\) GHG website](#).

The tree seedlings reference used in past surveys was intended to help translate this relatively abstract measurement into more concrete terms. Trees absorb CO₂ from the atmosphere as a part of their growth and maturation process. In this example, it would take 38 tree seedlings growing for a 10-year period to absorb the amount of CO₂e produced by this annual commute.

A number of respondents expressed confusion about the tree seedling metric in past surveys, so the commuter survey tool has been revised this year to provide other metrics and comparisons that are hopefully more intuitive to most survey respondents. However, the EPA's [Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator](#) can convert the metric ton CO₂e figure into other examples that might be even more meaningful to you. Simply enter the figure provided at the end of the survey (1.47 in this example) into the first "Amount" entry on the "If You Have Emissions Data" tab and click the "Calculate" button. It should also be noted that the "MT" abbreviation that was used in previous surveys was dropped this year to make it clear that the unit of measure is metric tons and not megatons.

How accurate is this survey? I was told my estimated annual emissions were 3.10 metric tons of CO₂e, but I drive an electric car that I charge at home with electricity generated by my solar panels.

While the survey results are relatively accurate overall, the individual estimate may not be accurate in this particular circumstance, due to the methodology employed in estimating emissions. The methodology uses per mile emission figures for the average fleet across the nation; the use of electric and hybrid vehicles is factored into these emission figures. Thus, these types of anomalies average out across the overall bureau/office and Department calculations.

The Department inquired about adding options to the commuter survey to allow employees to indicate that they drive an electric car, or to indicate how many miles per gallon their particular vehicle gets. We were informed that these types of changes were not possible at this time, but may be considered in the future.

Post-Survey Action

I wasn't pleased with the figure that I saw upon the completion of my survey. What can I do to reduce the carbon footprint of my commute?

The answer to how you can reduce the GHG emissions associated with your commute is not straight forward. This is because the options available to the Department's employees vary depending on a number factors, including where you live, where you work, your particular bureau and job responsibilities, the availability of public transportation, etc.

The way you get to and from work is a personal choice. In some of the Department's more remote locations, four-wheel drive trucks or sport utility vehicles (SUVs) may be the only viable commuting option. However, there are a number of potential options employees may consider, where appropriate.

Specifically, the use of public transportation, bicycling, teleworking, or alternative work schedules may be possible options to reduce your commuter emissions, compared to driving alone in a car, truck, or SUV every workday:

- **Public Transportation/Bicycling** - The Department offers transportation subsidy benefits to employees who use public transportation or a bicycle to get to work.

General information on these programs is available [here](#). Your bureau or office may have additional guidelines or protocols associated with applying for these benefits. It is recommended that you contact your [office or bureau transit subsidy coordinator](#) to inquire about your organization's specific application process.

- **Telework** - If you can perform the functions of your job remotely, you may wish to engage your supervisor in a conversation about

whether telework could be an option for you. General information on telework is available [here](#).

- ***Alternative work schedules (AWS) or compressed work schedules (CWS)*** - *Some jobs within the Department may be able to accommodate an AWS or CWS. This is an arrangement where you complete your required 80 hours per pay period in less than the traditional 10 workdays, thus reducing the number of days you commute to work. Again, you should engage your supervisor in a conversation about whether an AWS or CWS could be a viable option for you.*