

SSAFE Newsletter

Senior Stewards Acting for the Environment



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How to set up a successful environmental film series.

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Two simple sustainability upgrades make big savings.

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Airline passengers can purchase carbon offsets to compensate for the CO2 emitted by their flights.

Carbon Offsets: Blessing or Curse?

By Chris Sheppard, Kendal at Ithaca

We hear more and more these days about carbon offsets. Environmentally aware people buy them to lower their own carbon footprints and fight climate change. Corporations rely on them to reach net zero goals and burnish their images. But what are they, exactly? And are they actually a good idea or not?

A carbon offset is a way to compensate for the carbon dioxide you emit into the atmosphere. It “offsets” those emissions by supporting other climate mitigation efforts elsewhere. We do this by purchasing government-authorized “credits”

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Offsets (cont'd)

that are measurable and verifiable. Each credit typically represents one metric ton of carbon dioxide or its equivalent, and each credit is associated with the emission reduction from a specific carbon offset project such as landfill waste management. You can purchase carbon credits directly from projects, through specialized brokers, or from online retailers.

There are two main types of carbon credits: voluntary credits and compliance credits. Voluntary credits are purchased by individuals and organizations to reduce their carbon footprint, while compliance credits are used to meet regulatory requirements.

Reforestation projects are one common type of carbon offset, as is the construction of renewable energy projects or methane capture. Some carbon offset projects offer benefits beyond carbon reduction such as supporting renewable energy development or improving local economies.

Despite their potential benefits, the effectiveness and integrity of carbon offsets have been subjects of debate. The field is known for fraud and greenwashing (see sidebar), in which carbon offset projects exaggerate their environmental benefits. Moreover, the purchase of carbon credits can distract from the urgent need to address CO₂ emissions at their source. Plus, companies can look to carbon offsets as a way to continue polluting and avoid making effective emissions reduction changes.

It's crucial, therefore, to ensure that the offsets are real and that there's a genuine emission reduction project behind them. A trustworthy carbon offset provider will have their projects verified by a third party. This ensures that the carbon offset is legitimate and meets the necessary standards. All providers should be transparent about their processes, including how they choose their projects, how they measure and report emissions reductions, and how they allocate funds. Moreover, the provider should have a good track record of delivering on its projects effectively and credibly.

Here in Ithaca, we are fortunate to have the Finger Lakes Climate Fund, which offers carbon offsets for individuals, businesses, nonprofits, academic institutions, and special events. The Climate Fund has a unique focus of addressing the twin threats of climate change and income inequality by issuing carbon offset grant awards to lower-

Offset Your Carbon Footprint Locally

The Finger Lakes Climate Fund works to promote clean energy projects in the Finger Lakes area while strengthening our regional economy and assisting local families in need.

Air Car Home Quick

How many travelers?

Enter trip mileage

Or, let us calculate it

starting location

end location

round trip?

[Calculate Offset](#)

Or, send check to Sustainable Finger Lakes / 309 N Aurora / Ithaca, NY 14850 with 'FLCF' in memo line

Carbon offset tool offered by Sustainable Finger Lakes.

Offsets (cont'd)

income families to help pay for home energy improvements such as insulation and heat pumps. This fund provides a way for people to support our community while offsetting greenhouse gas emissions from their buildings or travel.

Sustainable Finger Lakes Climate Fund has been exploring possibilities with Kendal at Ithaca in the hope of establishing a plan to promote carbon offsets for campus projects and encourage residents who wish to offset their travel by purchasing credits. While these plans are still developing, anyone can use the tool at www.fingerlakesclimatefund.org to offset their carbon footprint.

The importance of rigorous standards and transparency in carbon offset projects cannot be overstated. The United Nations Carbon Offset Platform and the International Carbon Reduction and Offset Alliance (ICROA) are two of the agencies that confer carbon credits on projects. Additionally, here are a number of trustworthy carbon offset providers:

- shop.climeco.com
- www.climateimpact.com
- www.goldstandard.org
- www.terrapass.com
- www.native.eco

If you, as a resident, are considering air travel, for example, or your campus energy committee is considering ways to reduce its carbon footprint, it might be worth researching and investing in a carbon offset project. But *caveat emptor*: “trustworthy” is the name of the game.

What is Greenwashing?

When a company promotes itself as “sustainable” or “eco-friendly,” the red flags should go up. It may be greenwashing. To enhance its green image, a company may fraudulently advertise itself or its products. It may even misinform the public about its supposed efforts to combat climate change.

Delta Airlines is a case in point. Its claim of carbon neutrality has been challenged in a class action lawsuit because the company used unverifiable carbon offsets. Meanwhile, it has been charging travelers a premium to pay for environmentally friendly travel. This premium was ostensibly for the purchase of carbon credits associated with projects such as rainforest, wetland, and grassland conservation.

Carbon offsets, which entail funding a climate-beneficial activity to counteract the carbon pollution from a flight, for example, have become a major part of many corporate climate pledges. However, often these carbon offset benefits have been shown to be false.

Flying generates more than 2% of all greenhouse gas emissions, according to the International Energy Agency. Dutch airline KLM also relied on “junk” credits to claim carbon neutrality. Yet there were airlines that refused to buy these questionable credits. JetBlue no longer purchases carbon credits and is exploring other ways to reduce their emissions.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/delta-lawsuit-carbon-neutral-greenwashing-carbon-offsets/>

KENDAL AT HANOVER ENERGY AUDIT RESULTS

By Stu White, Kendal at Hanover

Last winter, Kendal at Hanover's (KaH) board adopted an addition to its values statement, under "Protecting the Environment":
"As stewards of the earth, who are called to protect and preserve the environment for future generations, we are resolved to achieve scope 1 and scope 2 carbon neutrality throughout our campus."

This powerful sentence influenced both the audit and the new KaH sustainability committee, as residents and staff work together to prioritize audit recommendations. Key findings are summarized below:

Envelope:

- **Attics:** diagnostic testing revealed significant air leakage and inadequate insulation (R-38); recommendations established goals for reduced air leakage rates and increased insulation to R-60.



- **Walls:** infrared testing showed thermal bridging (heat loss) at studs due to lack of continuous exterior insulation, degrading R value to below code levels; recommendation: add exterior insulation.

HVAC & Electrical:

- Recommendations include replacing propane boilers with heat pumps for heating and cooling; this despite poor payback due to current fuel costs (propane vs. electricity).
- The community center accounts for 60% of energy use at KaH; of that, approximately 80% is due to kitchen and laundry operations; an equipment upgrade and heat recovery will be a focus going forward.

On-site Solar:

- A preliminary study, to be confirmed, shows a 1 megawatt opportunity. The audit estimated savings of \$168K/yr, for a 21-year payback, before incentives.

The elephant in the room is always the cost to upgrade. There is also the cost of business as usual. We will be pressing for a Life Cycle Cost Analysis to shed some light on this.

The SSAFE Energy Audit Work Group led by Stu White, Kendal at Hanover, worked collaboratively to create a comprehensive Energy Audit RFP (request for proposal) template. You are invited to download and use this template at your senior living community. It was effectively utilized for the Kendal at Hanover deep energy retrofit audit.

Go to www.SSAFE.org/rfp to download the template for free.

TWO COTTAGES COMPARED, ONE CLEAR WINNER

By George Alexander, Kendal at Longwood

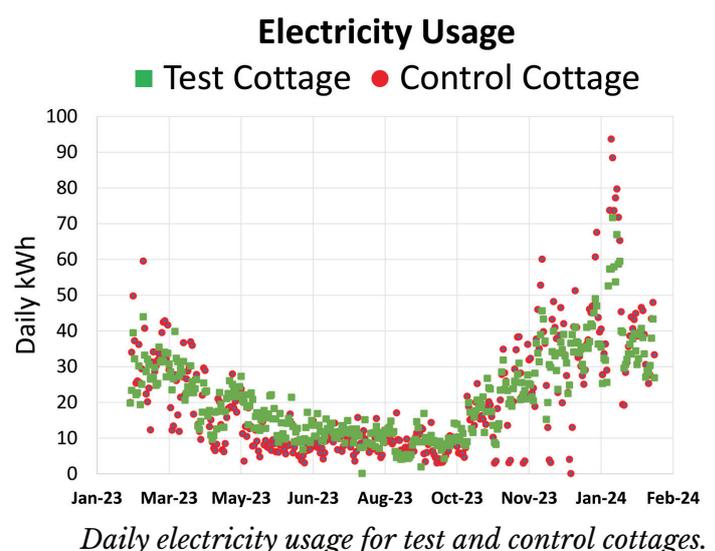
In the fall of 2022, an experiment in sustainability began at Kendal at Longwood. The question was whether modest efficiency improvements in our cottages could impact electrical usage. At the time, two one-bedroom-plus-den cottages with identical layouts were entering the turnover process. With occasional exceptions, our turnovers involve mostly cosmetic upgrades, with only minor changes to improve efficiency. In this experiment, one of the cottages got the standard treatment (we'll call this the "control" cottage); and the other got a modest investment in additional efficiency (the "test" cottage). Importantly, electrical monitoring gear was added to the breaker box in each unit so that a detailed record of the use of electricity could be kept.

Beyond the heat pumps and double-pane windows that both cottages received, the test cottage got two additional treatments. The amount of attic insulation was greatly increased (to a value of R-50, which is several times the typical insulation in our cottages). And work was done to improve the air sealing at the base of the exterior walls, an issue that goes back to the way our cottages were constructed over 50 years ago.

The cost of these two additional treatments in the test cottage was \$3,050 (\$1,800 for sealing followed by drywall replacement, and \$1,250 for blow-in insulation in the attic).

The first insight was that summer electricity usage was modest. In temperate climates such as ours in Pennsylvania, electrical heating causes a peak in demand in the winter. There is also a summer peak (for air conditioning) but it is smaller. I assumed I would see a two-peak pattern in the data, with summer and winter peaks. But the two cottages in this experiment show only minimal summer peaks. Both cottages have huge winter peaks, however.

You can see this pattern in the chart below. Each dot represents a day's use of energy by one of the cottages. The chart runs from February 2023 on the left to February 2024 on the right. The huge jump in electricity usage shown at the right represents the cold-weather period of November 2023 through February 2024. By contrast, there is only modest variability during the summer months (middle portion of the chart).



The second insight derives from the test cottage's winter performance. Looking at the winter peak, the difference between

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Cottages (cont'd)

the two cottages is dramatic. The highest part of the peak consists mostly of orange circles (the control cottage). There is a huge difference in use of electricity between the cottages during the coldest weather.

I believe the difference would have been even greater if not for the fact that the resident in the control cottage made several out-of-state trips during November and December, leaving the cottage at a low temperature setting. These periods of low use by the control cottage can be seen as orange dots near the bottom of the chart in the November-December period.

The data holds far more detail—this analysis barely scratches the surface of what may be learned from our experiment. But what this analysis shows is that the relatively modest changes made to the test cottage had a dramatic impact on its winter heating performance.

The SSAFE Unit Turnover Work Group was established to take advantage of the opportunity to make efficiency changes when a housing unit is turned over from one resident to another. Bob Gettings, Kendal at Lexington, chaired the collaborative effort to create the downloadable, printable, and shareable Unit Turnover Guide. You are invited to download and use this guide at your senior living community.

Go to www.SSAFE.org/turnover to download the guide for free.

We're Growing!

SSAFE is expanding beyond the original founding Kendal communities. Two new communities have joined SSAFE—**Wake Robin** and **Piper Shores**. They are the first non-Kendal "chapters" to join us, and we heartily welcome them. SSAFE member communities are now "chapters" of SSAFE, the Board having decided to adopt the term to describe communities in our organization.

Wake Robin is a Life Plan Community offering a full continuum of care on its 136-acre campus in Shelburne, VT. Just over 400 people living in 152 apartments and 98 cottages call Wake Robin home. Wake Robin is committed to responsible stewardship of resources: residents and staff work together to reduce the carbon footprint and take other steps to nurture the environment for a sustainable future.

Maine's only non-profit Lifecare Community, Piper Shores, is located in Scarborough. They have 340 independent living residents in 188 apartments and 64 cottages and estate homes. A sustainability plan completed in 2023 aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, minimize waste, conserve water and energy, and promote good stewardship of the land.



PLASTIC FILM TO BENCHES: THE TREX® CHALLENGE

By Hazel Dayton Gunn on behalf of the Sustainability Committee, Kendal at Ithaca

Editor's Note: There's a lot of plastic that curbside recyclers won't pick up. It's called plastic film, or polyethylene (PE)—and it's the most common plastic in the world. It includes those ubiquitous plastic grocery bags, but also such things as bread bags, cereal box liners, zip-top bags, packaging pillows, plastic mailing envelopes, and pallet wrap. Fortunately, certain local grocery stores will collect plastic film for use by TREX® in making benches and decking. In 2022, the Sustainability Committee at Kendal at Ithaca decided to follow in the footsteps of Kendal at Lexington (see the October 2021 issue of the SSAFE newsletter) and join the TREX® challenge.

Hazel Dayton Gunn, co-chair of the Sustainability Committee at Kendal at Ithaca (KAI), has sent us news about what they have recently accomplished to convert plastic film into benches:

“Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these (volunteers) from the (sometimes) swift completion of their appointed rounds.” (Fun fact: The USPS motto was modified from the Greek by William Mitchell KENDALL.)

At KAI eight volunteers have collected over 1½ tons (yes, tons, as in 2,000 pounds per) since beginning the TREX® challenge in 2022. There are three sites for the collection bins: one in the basement next to the loading dock which is filled by employees from Facilities and Environmental Services; one in the Craft Room; and one at the Rose Garden Café. They are lined with recyclable plastic bags supplied

by Facilities. Volunteers are scheduled to collect for five consecutive days per month. This allows the volunteers to inspect the bins, and if they are not full enough to aggregate into one (or more) bags, to wait until there is enough plastic to do so. It makes no sense to fill partial bags, thus using and wasting the very material we are trying to reduce.

The collection process involves first sorting the contents of the bins, because despite many informational notifications—at Town Halls, in *The Breeze*, from Sustainability Committee speakers—unacceptable materials still find their way into the bins. For example, cellophane is not made from plastic. It is made from cellulose, an organic substance derived from plant fibers. We also find paper, water bottles (some with the water still in them), even the occasional sock.



Volunteer Chris Sheppard helps collect and transport plastic film to our local grocery.

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Plastics (cont'd)

The correct film (stretchable please) plastic can be contaminated with food waste or liquids. All these items go into a trash receptacle. The sorted bagged plastic is then weighed, either on the scale in the fitness room or taken to our living units if we have a digital scale. We physically carry the bags to our units for temporary storage there or in our carports. At the end of the five-day monthly collection period the bags are photographed (horizontal photo only) and photo and total weight sent electronically to Chris Sheppard who forwards the information to TREX®. Volunteers transport their bags to a TREX®-designated grocery store (in our case Wegmans or Tops). At some point TREX® employees collect the bags for processing into benches and decks.

For our efforts, we are rewarded with a bench from TREX® once a year. However, our real motivation is the knowledge that we keep a substantial amount of plastic out of the landfill.

TREX® lists stores by state on its website: https://www.plasticsmarkets.org/jsfcontent/NexTrex_US_Locations_jsf_1.pdf.



One of several TREX benches at Kendal at Ithaca created from recycled plastic film.

Go Collington! 4 Benches in 2 Years

By Dorothy Yuan, Collington, a Kendal Affiliate



Collington resident, Liz Barbehenn, watches for birds on one of four TREX® benches on campus.

Plastic film—the kind used in packaging and often labeled #2 or #4—is not accepted in most single-stream recycling programs. However, it can be recycled through TREX®, the largest polyethylene film recycler in the United States. The company collects plastics from many grocery stores nationwide and makes them into composite decking, benches, and other items. As an incentive, TREX® has issued a challenge to communities. If they collect 1,000 pounds of plastics (previously 500 pounds) in a one-year period, they will be awarded one bench.

For the past two years, Collington residents have risen to the TREX® challenge. For every 500 pounds of plastics we collected and transported to our local grocery store, we have received a solid, high-quality bench made from the soft plastic. So far we have received four benches, placed in locations determined by the residents. Whether as seating for a group gathering or for bird watching in the woods, the TREX® benches have been a beautiful addition to our campus.

LET'S GO TO THE MOVIES!

By Joel Brody, Collington, a Kendal Affiliate

The lights dim, a hush comes over the audience, and a palpable sense of anticipation grows.... Who doesn't love a movie? And what a way to deliver a message with lasting impact!

When it comes to global warming, a film series is one of the best ways to communicate the complex ways in which our planet is changing. Perhaps that's why the residents at Collington are attending our Saturday showings in ever-increasing numbers. They're hungry for information, especially when it's delivered in an entertaining format.



Residents enjoy the latest in Collington's series of sustainability films.

As head of the Climate Action Committee, I was looking for ways our group could leverage films to inform residents about sustainability issues and inspire them to act. There were few events planned during the weekends, presenting a perfect opportunity to launch a monthly film series. I chose both dramas and documentaries, all of which were readily

accessible. To identify appropriate films, I drew on the SSAFE film library on the website (<http://www.ssafe.org/books-film>), recommendations from SSAFE members, and environmental film festivals.

Promotion is key to a successful film series. A week in advance of a film showing, I put flyers on bulletin boards and display stands throughout our main building. I also placed an announcement and description of the film in our weekly newsletter. Finally, I posted a detailed reminder about the film multiple times on the resident online discussion group site.

The films are generally shown at 3:00 p.m. on the second Saturday of the month. At least two of the films warranted an evening encore showing. Each showing is followed by an attendee discussion. We later learned that some residents continued to discuss the film beyond the movie showing. They reflected on ideas from the films and how they might be applied at the Collington campus. Others have shared their enthusiasm about a film with friends and family well beyond our community and provided source information for viewing it. Feedback has filtered in that people from this extended audience have watched one or more of the films on their own—an unintended but very positive outcome.

The importance of hope in a challenging world cannot be overstated. This program is bringing hope, through film, that positive changes are happening and that each of us, contributing in our own small way, can make a difference.

EARTH DAY: THE RICHNESS OF COLLABORATION

By the Newsletter Editorial Board

They say that two heads are better than one. Perhaps nowhere has that been more evident than in this newsletter, one of the aims of which is to share success stories among communities to inspire new thoughts, new actions.

That's exactly what the Education Team had in mind when it organized some brainstorming sessions to discuss Earth Day activities. Each SSAFE chapter came prepared to talk about their plans for this year as well as what worked or didn't work in previous years. What were their goals for Earth Day? What would a successful Earth Day look like?

Some of the many ideas put forth in these sessions are listed below, lending proof to the concept that cross-pollination—sharing thoughts, information, knowledge—can enrich the capabilities of the group as a whole.



The SSAFE Education Team hosted several Earth Day brainstorming sessions on Zoom. (The upper left paper sign reads, “Rethink, Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, reuse, reuse, Repair, Recycle.”)

1. Create a display about reducing single-use plastics. (The theme of Earth Day 2024 is “Planet vs. Plastics.”)
2. Engage a naturalist or educator to create presentations at a series of stations around the community.

3. Design a nature display case, possibly with a CD of bird calls.
4. Tour local recycling and/or composting centers.
5. Arrange an environmental film showing, musical presentation, poetry reading, or speaker talk on a sustainability topic.
6. Organize a “weed warrior” attack on invasive species.
7. Make “Burma-Shave” signs—a series of signs by the side of the road with a climate verse to be read in sequence.
8. Draw a community map of native plant species that attract birds or pollinators.
9. Celebrate Earth Day with a birthday party—candles, cake, and cards.
10. Create a hands-on activity like planting trees or making bee or bird houses.

Remember, “Every day is Earth Day.” This accurately captures our goals as we head toward April 22nd: celebrate the earth’s natural beauty, always; raise awareness of our endangered earth; get more people inspired to join the efforts of SSAFE; and above all, make it fun! Music, food, and hands-on activities will carry the day.

It’s gratifying to see so many residents making a real difference in their communities, giving back to nature while receiving its bounty. Let’s see how we can all heighten our environmental stewardship this Earth Day.

Find more ideas at www.SSAFE.org/earth-day

NORWAY'S PROVOCATIVE MOVE TOWARD DEEP SEA MINING

By Barclay Ward, Kendal at Hanover

Norway has become the first country to open their shores to deep sea mining. In early January of 2024, the Norwegian parliament voted to grant licenses to mining companies to begin deep sea exploration.

We face a conundrum. The world must move away from using fossil fuels, a goal recently endorsed by COP28. To do so, green energy must be greatly expanded, including wind power, solar energy, and electric vehicles. These newer forms of energy rely heavily on such elements as nickel, cobalt, manganese, and lithium. This necessarily means more mining, and one area of particular interest is the ocean floor, roughly 70% of the earth's surface. There seems little doubt that mining the oceans will disturb marine life, especially life on the ocean floor and, indeed, the floor itself. A chief difficulty at the moment is that scientists are still in the early stages of exploring life on the vast ocean floor. We don't know the full effects of mining on ocean ecology. As one scientist noted, we are in danger of losing species before we even know they exist.

Fortunately, in the case of Norway, an environmental assessment is required. But who does the assessment? The mining company? An independent institute? The Norwegian government? One can imagine that the outcome of the assessment could depend on the assessor.

While Norway's decision is not synonymous with a permission to mine, it does open the doors to potential violation of the

sea bed. Presently this applies only to the Norwegian exclusive economic zone (EEZ), a large area north of Iceland, between Norway and Greenland. In international waters, deep sea mining is regulated by the International Seabed Authority in conformity with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, but in the case of the Norwegian EEZ, the government of Norway has exclusive jurisdiction.



Deep sea biodiversity and ecosystems are at risk.

Although Norway is certainly not alone in its interest in deep sea mining, and Japan has taken steps in this direction, other countries are less supportive. The European Union (EU) has called for a ban on deep sea mining. Norway, however, is not an EU member. Could Norway's actions set a precedent for others to follow?

At this time we don't know how far or how quickly the Norwegian initiative will proceed, but it's clear that a fundamental shift to clean energy will highlight the apparent attraction of deep sea mining, bringing the threat of irrevocable damage to oceans, marine life, and our future ever nearer.

Wrapping Up

Good News!

*By Ted Wolner, SSAFE Advocacy Project Team
Chair, Kendal at Oberlin*

A large coalition of Big Green groups and smaller ones like SSAFE won a huge victory over the fracking industry in early February. Liquefied natural gas (LNG) is produced by cooling fracked gas, making it into a clear, colorless liquid. We pressured the U.S. Department of Energy to stop reviews for at least a year of 17 applications for new LNG export terminals, and we won!

Every LNG export terminal is a carbon bomb. To give you a sense of the victory's scale...if all 17 projects were to be approved (added to the existing 12), they would create annual carbon emissions equal to those from every house *on earth, every year, for 30 years.*

A second victory: the SSAFE Advocacy Team surpassed our goal of 700 signatures!

The SSAFE Advocacy Team hopes to reach 1000+ signatures on future petitions but we need your help. Email info@ssafe.org to offer your assistance or join the team!

Donate Today!

It's tax-deductible!

And it's easy. Just send a check—made out to SSAFE:

Scot Drysdale
32 Penn Road, Apt. 419
Hanover, NH 03755

SSAFE uses these funds to support efforts such as guiding senior living campuses to net-zero emissions, climate advocacy, and climate education. Senior Stewards Acting for the Environment (SSAFE) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. EIN: 87-1229514.



Thinking of SSAFE

When an active SSAFE member recently died, his family included SSAFE as a beneficiary in his obituary in lieu of flowers.

You or your family may want to consider naming SSAFE in your estate planning.

SSAFE Newsletter

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Submissions & Comments

We want your feedback! We're always looking for good stories to provide inspiration to other senior living community residents. Send us your articles, ideas, questions, or comments!

We'd love to hear from you—drop us an email at info@SSAFE.org