Cool Dentists

Our planet has reached extreme weather conditions. Recently, a tornado in the US killed 519 people. Floods in Asia and Australia killed 2,000 and left large swaths of each country under water. Korea had its heaviest snowfall in recorded history. My heart goes out to all the families of the victims of the recent serious disasters. These events have been shaped by global warming. Scientists have realized that excess carbon dioxide and other gasses released into the atmosphere by humans and natural events together cause the “greenhouse effect,” which results in global warming. A “carbon footprint” is the total of greenhouse gasses produced by a human activity. Can you guess the size of the carbon footprint associated with dental treatment? Identifying the exact extent of carbon emissions from dental work is difficult. However, we do know that dental care involves activities that, directly or indirectly, produce a great deal of carbon dioxide. Sterilizing dental equipment and manufacturing artificial bone and implants requires a larger supply of energy than you might imagine. In addition, carbon dioxide is excreted when casting a crown. Knowing where and how you generate greenhouse gases is the first step in reducing them.

De-carbonize your clinic - there are many ways to de-carbonize. Just as preventive medicine eliminates unnecessary pain and economic burdens, it alleviates our carbon emissions by avoiding extensive treatment. When the government promotes policies to improve public oral health and dentists help prevent dental diseases from getting worse, they also help mini-

mize carbon emissions. Healthy teeth have a smaller carbon footprint - no grafting and no casting crowns.

Another way dental professionals can reduce their carbon footprint is through e-learning. e-Journals and Web conferences will help reduce carbon emissions. Journal of Periodontal & Implant Science produces journal issues on paper and electronically. However, unlike in the past, we are now reducing our paper issues. I hope our members can understand that this policy is good for the environment. Spending less time and energy on travel is another way of reducing one's carbon footprint. Attending a conference far away generates a great deal of carbon dioxide emissions during travel. A two-day trip can put about half a ton of carbon into the atmosphere. Web-based learning, online dental expos, and online conferences will reduce our carbon footprint.

"It's not too late to stop this dangerous climate change if the world acts now - and fast. We need to save energy, reduce demands, and develop safe and renewable alternatives to polluting fossil fuels," said Mike Childs, head of climate at Friends of the Earth.

A cool dentist must make an effort to cool the planet.

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