The carbon footprint of some of our day-to-day life

The information below is taken from the book “How bad are bananas?”, by Mike Berners-Lee (2010). It is intended to help create a conversation about the ‘Climate Impact’ of our day-to-day choices, and to facilitate the development of ‘carbon awareness’. Climate Change and Carbon Footprint are complex subjects, as it is to try making right decisions. Hence the importance of at least becoming literate and aware of the fact that our choices as consumers always have a cost to the environment. And that maybe we only need half (or less!) of what we buy.

By the way, according to the author, bananas turn out to be a fine low-carbon food! Though not totally free of sustainability issues.

A few notes to begin with:

- What is carbon footprint? In simple, as described in the book, it is the ‘*best estimate that we can get of the full climate change impact of something’*.
- The full footprint of something includes *direct* and *indirect* emissions. Very intricate! If made simple, my carbon footprint of driving my car, for example, is not just about how much and how long I drive my car for, but also the footprint of the processes involved in the manufacturing of my car and the productions of the fuel/electricity it needs.
- The *exact* carbon footprint of something is very difficult to calculate, and the figures shared here are items and activities’ *best estimates* for their carbon footprint. But remember, the important thing here is to begin our education and awareness of how everything we consume has an impact on the environment, and the more we understand this, the better-informed decisions we can do.
- What does a tonne of CO_2 look like? If you filled a couple of standard-size garden water butts to the brim with petrol and set fire to them, about a tonne of carbon would be directly released into the atmosphere. The footprint of driving that amount of petrol would of course be more.
- The average UK person has an annual carbon footprint of around 15 tonnes according to the book (released in 2010). Oxfam reported in 2020 that the average Brit emits more carbon in the first two weeks of the year than citizens of at least seven African nations. It also reported that the wealthiest 1% of the UK population produces 11 times the amount of carbon emissions than someone on the poorest half of the population, and 6 times that of the national average.
- What carbon footprint should we aim at? That’s a tricky question. The important thing that we need to remember is that we share the planet with other 7.8 billion people, and that we have put so much carbon already into the atmosphere, that we can’t afford keeping in the same way.

Here you will find some estimates of the carbon footprint (CO_2e or *carbon dioxide equivalent*) of things that we consume or do on our daily lives, and some others that might be of interest. All figures have been taken from the mentioned book "How bad are bananas".

You can use them as a base for discussion with questions like:

- What do you think has more carbon footprint, a paper bag or a plastic bag?
- But what do you think is better for the environment in general? Plastic or paper?
- So what do you think we should try to do in general?
- What about how we dry our hands?
- What could we do?

And please remember, just like in the book, the purpose of this resources is to help in the development of awareness about the impact to the environment that everything we do/buy can have.

A pint of tap water	0.14 g CO_2e
A year's tap water for a typical UK citizen	14 kg CO_2e
A 500ml bottle of water (average in terms of source and transport)	160g CO_2e
A pint of milk	723g CO_2e
An apple from the garden	0g CO_2e
An apple, local and seasonal	10g CO_2e
An apple, average	80g CO_2e
An apple that's been shipped, cold store and inefficiently produced	150g CO_2e
An orange, average	90g CO_2e
An orange, air-freighted for the start of the season	1Kg CO_2e
A banana	80g CO_2e
A punnet of strawberries, grown in season in your own country	150g CO_2e
A punnet of strawberries, grown out of season and flown in, or grown locally in a hothouse	1.8kg CO_2e
1 kg of tomatoes, organic loose tomatoes, traditional variety, grown locally in June	0.4kg CO_2e
1 kg of tomatoes, average	9.1kg CO_2e
1 kg of tomatoes, organic 'on the vine' cherry tomatoes, grown on the UK in March	50Kg CO_2e
1kg of hard cheese	12kg CO_2e
A 4-ounce uncooked beefsteak	2kg CO_2e
A pair of shoes, average	11.5 kg CO_2e
A par of adult jeans, average	6kg CO_2e

An email	4g CO_2e
An hour's TV on a 42-inch plasma screen	220g CO_2e
Drying your hands by letting them drip	0g CO_2e
Drying your hands with Dyson Airblade or similar tech	3g CO_2e
Drying your hands using 1 paper towel	10g CO_2e
Drying your hands with standard electric dryer	20g CO_2e
A standard plastic carrier bag, like supermarket ones	10g CO_2e
A recycled and lightweight paper carrier bag	12g CO_2e
A heavyweight reusable plastic bag	50g CO_2e
An elaborate paper bag from virgin paper as supplied by many clothing retailers	80g CO_2e
A toilet roll from recycled paper	450g CO_2e
A toilet roll from virgin paper	730g CO_2e
Travelling from Glasgow and London and back, by bike	53kg CO_2e
Travelling from Glasgow and London and back, by coach	66kg CO_2e
Travelling from Glasgow and London and back, by train	120kg CO_2e
Travelling from Glasgow and London and back, by small efficient car	330kg CO_2e
Travelling from Glasgow and London and back, by plane	500kg CO_2e
Travelling from Glasgow and London and back, by large four-wheel drive	1100kg CO_2e
An active volcano on a quiet year	1 million tonnes CO_2e
All the world's volcanoes together, per year	300 million tonnes CO_2e
A bushfire, like Australia's in 2009	165 million tonnes CO_2e
The 2010 South Africa World Cup	2.8 million tonnes CO_2e
The world's data centres (estimation for 2020 done in 2010)	250-340 million tonnes CO_2e