

Created in 1874, the Universal Postal Union is an intergovernmental organization of 191 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 600,000 post offices the world over, 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 660,000 vehicles, 250,000 motorcycles 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 and how to promote the use of alternative vehicles for mail delivery.

What the UPU does

Promoting the postal sector's sustainable development is an important part of the UPU's world postal strategy for 2009-2012. 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 and international and UN organizations. In 2008, the Union boosted its relations with the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) with a new partnership. This will help the UPU to establish a methodology for developing an inventory of greenhouse gas emissions produced by the postal sector and help it assist others in reducing the impact of their postal activities on the environment. The UPU has also joined the initiative "Sustainable United Nations", with the goal of becoming a climate neutral organization.

The sector's footprint

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

Close to 100 countries have provided the necessary data to the UPU to produce this inventory and more are expected to follow suit. The aim in collecting this data is to analyze the main sources of greenhouse gas emissions produced by Posts (depending on geographical location, level of development of country, size, type of activities, etc.). A simplified guide will soon be 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 a tool developed based on recommendations made by UNEP and the Greenhouse Gas Protocol Initiative (GHG Protocol) to capture Posts' data and produce a map of their greenhouse gas emissions. The UPU expects to announce the results of this first inventory of the global postal sector's carbon footprint while the UN Climate Change Conference is taking place in Copenhagen from December 7 to 18, 2009.

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, initial results indicate that emphasis should be placed on using transportation that pollutes less. In developing countries, the focus should be on saving energy, given that coal is often used to produce electricity and that buildings are old. 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.

At the same time, the UPU is collaborating with restricted unions such as POST-EUROP, an association of European designated postal operators, and other organizations such as the International Post Corporation, a grouping of some 20 postal operators. The three organizations are working together to establish a common standard to ensure that all Posts operating in comparable contexts use a similar methodology to calculate their greenhouse gas emissions.

Furthermore, to ensure its work is effective in the field, the UPU has established a world-

wide 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.



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

Charity begins at home...

The International Bureau, the UPU head-quarters in Berne, has also established an inventory of the greenhouse gas emissions it produces. In 2008, the International Bureau produced 1,500 tons of CO₂. Energy and paper consumption account for 48% of these emissions, while official travel represents 29% and staff commuting, 23%.The data has been given to the UN Environment Management Group, which will present the first results concerning all UN agencies, funds and programmes to the Chief Executive Board in September 2009.

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 will be renovated to reduce energy consumption. The UPU will also develop a policy to ensure that staff travelling on missions use the most ecological means of transportation. This, combined with other activities, will help make the UPU more climate neutral.

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 kilowatthour 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 fuelefficient 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.



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 at halting climate change.



The USPS's new green roof in New York (Photo: USPS)

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 retimbers 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 E-mail: sust.dev@upu.int

