

For Immediate Release

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USGBC-LA Releases White Paper & Hosts Panel on “Telecommuting’s Impact on Greenhouse Gas”

First in White Paper Pandemic Series, Produced by USGBC-LA and its Committee of LA’s Top Sustainability Executives

Los Angeles, CA (February 24, 2021) – A year into the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant portion of Angelenos are still telecommuting (aka "working from home") to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Across the U.S., the number of days worked from home in 2020 more than doubled compared to 2019. Even after the pandemic subsides, experts predict telecommuting rates will remain far higher than pre-pandemic levels, begging the question, how will this shift in workforce location impact the environment?

At 4:00pm PT tomorrow (Feb. 25) the [Los Angeles Chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council](#) (USGBC-LA) will host a panel presenting the findings in a white paper, “Telecommuting’s Impact on Greenhouse Gas.” This will be the first paper in USGBC-LA’s **White Paper Pandemic Series** which will present three whitepapers from now through April, produced in collaboration with the organization’s LA Sustainability Executives Roundtable (LASER) committee, comprised of the region’s top corporate sustainability executives and leaders. [Registration](#) for the panel is open and USGBC-LA looks to provide regional environmental leadership around these issues of telecommuting, plastic waste, and carbon offsets as we collectively work to emerge from the pandemic.

This first panel discussion will be framed and moderated by Hilary Norton, Chairwoman and Commissioner, CA Transportation Commission (CTC) with panelists from the LA County Metropolitan Authority, Streetlight Data, and the Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI).

Though it's often assumed telecommuting reduces greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs), after diving into the scientific literature, the findings aren't so clear. Telecommuting has a complex impact on both the *transportation* and *building* sectors, which combined, are responsible for the vast majority of GHGs in LA County. With this in mind, the white paper explores:

- how these two sectors have been impacted by COVID-19 and telecommuting,
- potential implications of telecommuting on greenhouse gas (GHGs), and
- what private companies and public policymakers should consider to ensure increased telecommuting is compatible with the L.A. region's climate change goals.

Top Findings & Recommendations:

- While several studies show telecommuting reduces traffic congestion and commute times, other studies suggest telecommuting may increase non-work travel and eventually encourage workers to move outside the urban center towards suburban or rural communities, potentially worsening urban sprawl and associated GHG emission impacts (e.g., reliance of personal vehicles, larger housing footprint).
- To minimize building-related GHG emissions from increased telecommuting, several studies suggest office buildings should downsize their footprint and implement a shared workspace model such that capacity is maximized each day, regardless of the number of workers telecommuting.
- To minimize potential GHG emission increases from telecommuting, we recommend expanding and incentivizing use of public, active, and electric vehicle transportation infrastructure, and decarbonizing both home and commercial office spaces via electrification, efficiency, and demand response technologies.

“This unprecedented collective experience of the pandemic has given us a unique opportunity to evaluate telecommuting as a potential long-term solution to reducing the impact of vehicle related greenhouse gas emissions,” states Ben Stapleton, USGBC-LA Executive Director. “Unfortunately, there are no simple answers to complex questions, but it is clear that going forward we need to leverage this moment to be more strategic about how we use office space and transit incentives to include telecommuting.”

[Download](#) the white paper now to find out what’s in store for telecommuting in 2021.

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About U.S. Green Building Council-Los Angeles

Founded in 2002, USGBC-LA is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization committed to creating a prosperous and sustainable future within one generation. Our mission is to accelerate all aspects of sustainability in the built environment by delivering access to knowledge, resources, recognition and networking. *Learn, Share and Lead Green.* (www.usgbc-la.org)