

Climate Positive - Northmore Gordon

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Climate Positive

Climate Positive refers to the concept that an entity's actions are having a net positive benefit to the climate. It is generally achieved through surrendering more carbon offsets than an entity's actual emissions require. According to Northmore Gordon, Climate Positive is often used interchangeably with the term Carbon Negative, which creates confusion between the two terms. The glossary entry was published by Northmore Gordon on June 7, 2021.

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What does the term 'Climate Positive' mean?

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How does a Climate Positive claim differ from a net-zero or carbon-neutral claim?

A Climate Positive claim goes beyond achieving net-zero emissions by actively reducing more emissions than an entity produces. While a carbon-neutral claim requires a defined framework, complete boundary, and all supporting requirements—with purchased offsets subtracted from an emissions inventory—a Climate Positive outcome explicitly involves surrendering more carbon offsets than emissions require. This creates a claimed surplus benefit. However, the same accountability applies: maintain a claim file with exact wording, supporting calculations, source documents, period, assumptions, and approver. Do not convert a conditional or partial result into an unqualified whole-business claim.

What accounting framework should guide a Climate Positive claim?

A Climate Positive claim requires the same accounting rigor as carbon-neutral and net-zero claims. Start by writing a practical boundary statement documenting entities or activities included, reporting period, the framework being used, data sources, and exclusions. Separate physical reductions from purchased offsets; do not subtract offsets from an emissions inventory without applying the relevant reporting framework correctly. Different reporting frameworks exist for corporate inventories, products,

and projects. We provide carbon-accounting guidance and can support development of boundary statements and claim files that distinguish forecast results from verified outcomes.

What role do carbon offsets play in achieving a Climate Positive outcome?

Carbon offsets are purchased instruments representing emissions reductions or removals from outside an organization's operations, used separately from inventory accounting. To achieve Climate Positive, an entity purchases and retires more offsets than its emissions total. However, buying an instrument does not by itself establish every possible claim about a business or product. Establish the inventory boundary and the proposed public claim before selecting instruments. Document certificate ownership, retirement evidence, and reconcile which offsets support which claims. We provide environmental-attribute due diligence and instrument selection guidance to verify the integrity and validity of purchased offsets before procurement and retirement.

How should a Climate Positive claim be documented and maintained?

Maintain a claim file that retains the exact wording, supporting calculation, source documents, reporting period, assumptions, and approver for the Climate Positive assertion. If the public wording changes, verify whether the same evidence still supports it. Keep forecast and realized outcomes distinct, distinguishing between estimated future reductions and verified actual results. Record the precise offsets surrendered, their source scheme, quantity, vintage, and retirement date. Our carbon advisory services include reporting support and can assist in establishing the documentation structure needed for credible Climate Positive claims that withstand scrutiny.

What are the practical implications of using the term 'Climate Positive' versus 'Carbon Negative'?

According to Northmore Gordon, Climate Positive is often used interchangeably with Carbon Negative, which creates confusion. Both terms imply a net positive climate benefit beyond net-zero, but the interchangeability obscures the specific mechanism and evidence. Using imprecise language risks misrepresenting the actual outcome or failing to establish the required boundary and framework. A clear public statement should explain whether the claim rests on physical reductions, offset purchases, or a combination, and over what period. Our carbon-management diagnostic workshops help organizations clarify language, establish current positions, and identify gaps in carbon management practices, including the accurate representation of environmental claims.

Can Northmore Gordon assist with developing a Climate Positive strategy and substantiating the claim?

Yes. Our carbon advisory services connect emissions information with engineering, procurement, and investment decisions. We offer diagnostic workshops to clarify strengths and gaps; Scope 1, 2, and 3 inventory work; opportunity assessment and feasibility evaluation; transition planning to define reduction pathways; and environmental-attribute due diligence for offsets and certificates. For entities pursuing a Climate Positive outcome, we can help establish an accurate emissions baseline, identify abatement opportunities, assess offset eligibility and quality, structure a documented transition workplan, and maintain the claim file required to substantiate the net-positive climate benefit assertion.

What common pitfalls should organizations avoid when making a Climate Positive claim?

Avoid converting an estimate, forecast, or partial result into an unqualified whole-business Climate Positive claim. Do not describe a renewable-electricity purchase or single offset transaction as eliminating every emissions category. Distinguish between purchased offsets and physical reductions; do not present them as the same change. Avoid claiming a Climate Positive outcome without specifying the boundary, reporting period, and accounting framework used. Do not assume that achieving Climate Positive in one scope or location applies organization-wide. Finally, do not use imprecise language such as 'Climate Positive' without clarifying the exact mechanism—whether more offsets are being surrendered, physical emissions reduced beyond targets, or both. Our carbon-accounting guidance and advisory services help organizations establish credible boundaries and avoid these common errors.

