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Airlines wing into action

Most green flight initiatives are implemented in the developed nations. These include:

- KLM Royal Dutch Airlines intends to have 12 Fokker-50 planes (or 7% of the fleet) running on algal biofuel by 2010.
- European airlines have decided to be part of a carbon trading scheme initiative from 2012.
- Air New Zealand plans to obtain 10% of its fuel from alternative sources by 2013.

On the homefront, in June 2008, Malaysia Airlines (MAS) became the first airline in South-East Asia to offer passengers the option of paying voluntarily to reduce their carbon footprint by a quantity equal to their estimated contribution via its Voluntary Carbon Offset Scheme (VCOS).

Representatives from MAS, Firefly, MASwings and an IT consultancy had worked together to set up the mechanism and develop the carbon calculator, which lies at the heart of the VCOS objectives.

Travellers can log on to MAS website, key in the destination and point of departure, and the carbon calculator will churn out the ringgit amount needed to offset their travel. This can be added to total ticket cost.

An official from MAS says the response to the VCOS programme has been encouraging.

"Since the start of the programme, the funds collected have reached RM150,000. Hopefully, we'll see more contributions this year," she adds.

The funds are channelled into a trust fund managed by the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia and goes towards the conservation and rehabilitation of forests.

On green flights, the official says: "Our team is closely monitoring the biofuel progress. Once it's certified safe for use by the authorities, we will consider using this alternative for lower carbon emission."

Other than that, she says MAS is also doing its best to promote "green journey by investing in new aircraft with more fuel efficiencies, to lower carbon and noise footprint."

By 2015, she adds, MAS will have received all its new aircraft and have one of the youngest fleets in Asia. "This will result in a significant reduction in our overall carbon footprint," she notes.

She says MAS will also continuously find ways to improve weight reduction on board and try to use more recyclable items.

This include using paper meal boxes that can be recycled, trial recycling of in-flight waste, dynamic fuel savings by flying direct routes, continuous descent approaches, increased engine wash for better fuel efficiencies and on-ground initiatives in energy conservation.

There is also an effort to create more environmental awareness among staff and customers and to promote green practices. In addition, the airline supports and participates in social and community work on environment and conservation.

"It's a long journey. MAS is committed to green projects and have started to take clear steps towards this direction," says the official.

AirAsia has also purchased new and more efficient planes, which produce less carbon dioxide emission.