

Archival Emissions: Calculating the Environmental Impact of Collections Storage

BEN GOLDMAN

According to the Society of American Archivists' Core Values Statement on Sustainability, "Caring for collections and serving communities—along with developing acquisition, processing, storage, and service models—must necessarily involve an ongoing awareness of the impact of archival work on the environment." While it's generally accepted that societies must rapidly decarbonize to avoid the worst impacts of future climate change, archivists remain largely unaware of the greenhouse gas emissions associated with their activities.

This presentation will offer insight into the environmental impact of one aspect of "collections care." It will share initial findings from an effort to estimate the emissions generated by one archive's annex storage facility, based on an examination of energy consumption from utilities, environmental controls, and archival density. This work builds on a 2021 project in the Penn State University Libraries to inventory the greenhouse gas emissions from utilities and mobile combustion (travel) for a one year period.

About the author:

Ben Goldman is the University Archivist at Penn State. His research interests are focused on the intersection of climate change, sustainability, and archival practice.