

## **Carbon Footprints And Consumers**

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### **Behaviour Session**

In the UK, the Carbon Trust has been developing a methodology for assessing the lifecycle greenhouse emissions associated with consumer products and assessing ways of communicating this information to consumers. There are two desirable outcomes: this will help consumers decide which products and brands to choose; and it will drive producers to reduce the carbon footprint of their products to improve their market position.

A set of trials with a range of companies is currently under way. At the same time market research is being conducted to assess how consumers might react to carbon footprint information. In one survey, 2/3 of consumers said that a label indicating that a supplier was working to reduce their carbon footprint would make them more likely to buy a product. 70% also said that it was important to see a quantitative indicator of the carbon footprint on the label. This was not necessarily because consumers could interpret this number in a meaningful way. However, they wanted assurance that companies had done the calculations and were working to reduce their footprint.

The Carbon Trust's work is currently following three streams. There is very high agreement that a uniform methodology be used to assess carbon footprints. The Carbon Trust and DEFRA have therefore co-sponsored the British Standards Institution (BSI) to develop a Publicly Available Specification (PAS 2050) for the "Specification for the assessment of the life cycle greenhouse gas emissions of goods and services". This may be available by June 2008 but a number of issues remain to be resolved relating to Life Cycle Assessment procedures and the need, or otherwise, for third party certification. The PAS could be the starting point for an international standard at a later date.

The second stream is developing procedures to determine whether companies have reduced the carbon footprint of a product over a period of time (say two years). This will provide a *framework* rather than a specification or standard. There is least consensus among industry and retailers about the third stream dealing with communication of information relating to carbon footprints. A number of companies do not believe that a label communicating the grams of carbon associated with a product is the way forward. The Carbon Trust is developing more flexible *guidelines* for communication in this area.

The methods for calculating carbon footprints are probably not sufficiently developed for consumers to compare products like with like at the moment. But they can give consumers the assurance that companies are working to improve lifecycle emissions along a supply chain, thereby creating trust in brands.