

Nature paper calls for carbon labeling

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Labeling products with information on the size of the carbon footprint they leave behind could help both consumers and manufacturers make better, environmentally friendly choices.

A Michigan State University professor and colleagues, writing in the April issue of the journal *Nature [Climate Change](#)*, said that labeling products, much like food products contain labels with nutritional information, could offer at least a short-term solution.

"Even modest changes in the household sector could significantly reduce emissions," wrote Thomas Dietz, a professor of sociology who also is with MSU's [Environmental Science](#) and Policy Program. "A carbon-labeling program could reduce [carbon emissions](#) in two ways: By influencing consumer choices and by encouraging firms to identify efficiencies throughout the supply chain."

Recent surveys, Dietz said, have found that nearly one-third of all consumers are willing to purchase "green" products or have already done so. The problem, he said, is a lack of information.

"A major barrier to improved [energy efficiency](#) in households seems to be a lack of understanding of the impacts of various actions and products," Dietz said. "Providing information would lower this barrier, allowing consumers to make more informed choices without substantial effort.

"The value of the label comes not from providing perfect information,

but better information than the consumer has at present."

The authors of the piece said that labeling also may induce firms to reduce their emissions in ways that lower their costs, enhance their reputations, and make them more supportive of governmental policy measures that re-enforce their emissions-reducing actions.

There are often opportunities for cost savings by reducing fossil fuel use in manufacturing and distributing products. The analyses needed for carbon labeling can identify those potential savings.

The authors write that labeling alone will not solve the problem. But argue that a "private carbon-labeling program for consumer products could help fill the policy gap by influencing both corporate supply chains and consumer behavior."

Provided by Michigan State University

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