

Consumers care about carbon footprint

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How much do consumers care about the carbon footprint of the products they buy? Would they care more if the goods were labeled with emissions data? Does it matter at which stage in the lifecycle of a product the carbon is emitted? Research published in the *International Journal of Environmental Policy and Decision Making* offers a way to find out.

Christopher Groening of the College of Business Administration, at Kent State University, in Ohio and colleagues Jeffrey Inman of the University of Pittsburgh and William Ross of the University of Connecticut, have developed and tested a framework based on the consumer's accountability for the carbon emitted. Study participants view a [carbon footprint](#) label akin to labels that have appeared on some existing products. The label displays the [carbon dioxide emissions](#) associated with their production, transportation, usage and disposal, thus giving an indication to the buyer the likely impact on climate change of buying a particular product.

In the first group of studies, the research team established that carbon emissions and a carbon emissions label would indeed play a role in consumer product decisions, although not as great a role as price. In a second set of studies, the team found that emissions associated with usage were most important to consumers followed by the transportation and disposal stages. The carbon footprint of the manufacturing process was considered less important to consumers than the other stages in the product's lifecycle because it is more distal from the consumer's control. That is, the participants felt they were less accountable for carbon

emitted during manufacture as opposed to the usage stage. Consumers value recycling a product, but the researchers found that, overall, the consumers would prefer manufacturers to offset carbon emissions rather than having to address the problem directly themselves.

Consumers are increasingly concerned with [climate change](#) issues, government legislation is being put in place and already carbon labeling is appearing on some products. "We find that participants not only take the [carbon](#) label into account when making product decisions, but they want detailed information on the label," the researchers explain. They suggest that companies should prepare for how [carbon emissions](#) labels might affect future consumer choice.

More information: Christopher Groening et al. The role of carbon emissions in consumer purchase decisions, *International Journal of Environmental Policy and Decision Making* (2015). [DOI: 10.1504/ijepdm.2015.074719](#)

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