BBC NEWS

Tuesday, 21 November 2006, 00:26 GMT

Scheme to cut 'carbon footprint'

A scheme designed to help companies measure the total amount of carbon emissions from their goods and services has been launched by the Carbon Trust.


Companies are urged to consider the size of their "carbon footprint"

The "cradle-to-grave" initiative will provide businesses with a profile of products' pollution, from the sourcing of raw materials through to disposal.

A recent poll by the Trust showed that 66% of people asked wanted to know the "carbon footprint" of their purchases.

The carbon audits aim to identify ways firms can cut energy use and emissions.

"Cutting carbon in the supply chain is the next critical stage in the business contribution to reduce emissions to tackle climate change, "said Carbon Trust chief executive Tom Delay.

Until now, the Trust, a government-funded independent company, had only offered an audit of firms' energy consumption.

The new scheme's "carbon investigations" will look at the amount of carbon being emitted at each stage of a product's life; from the supply of raw materials and production, through to delivery, consumption and disposal.

This approach is also known as a "lifecycle assessment" or "cradle-to-grave" analysis.

Consumers' concerns

"Delivering low carbon products into the hands of consumers will not only reduce energy bills and enhance corporate and brand reputations; but will open up new revenue streams and increase brand loyalty if properly communicated," Mr Delay said.

Recent research commissioned by the Trust showed that consumers appeared to be influenced by environmental issues.

A survey of 1,159 people, carried out by pollsters GfK NOP, found that 66% of those questioned wanted to know the carbon footprint of products they were buying. And 67% said the information would influence their purchasing decisions.

A pilot study, involving crisps manufacturer Walkers and the Trinity Mirror media group, identified annual energy savings worth £2.7m ($5.1), and found that it would cut carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions by 28,000 tonnes.

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>
> Jonathan Johns, Ernst and Young

Another company taking part in the scheme is Boots plc, which plans to produce a "low carbon shampoo".

Boots' sustainable development manager, Andrew Jenkins, said he hoped it would help the chemist retail company "develop more carbon efficient processes and provide an opportunity to produce products that helped our customers move towards a low carbon lifestyle".

The scheme has been welcomed by Jonathan Johns, head of the UK Renewables Group at Ernst and Young, the professional services company.

"People think of climate change as a threat, but it is very much an opportunity for business as well," he said.

"But it is not just about supply chains though," Mr Johns added. "It is also about the infrastructure that companies have to deliver their goods.

"People who are making decisions about putting in expensive infrastructure, for example new office blocks, need to consider its carbon footprint because otherwise there is a danger it will be out-of-date within about five years."

"If you are major purchaser of electricity and you have the land, there is an issue as to whether you generate some of your electricity through on-site micro-generation or combined heating and power," he suggested.

"You can actually make money by taking part in the carbon equation because businesses need to also recognise that green taxes are increasingly on the horizon, therefore having a carbon-friendly footprint makes sense."

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