



Press Release

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Consumers wrong-footed on environmental footprint

Today, ANEC publishes a detailed critique of Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) as a measure of environmental impacts: "[Environmental assessment goes astray. A critique of environmental footprint methodology and its ingredients](#)", and calls on the European Commission to re-think its approach to environmental assessment.

Consumers need a clear and unambiguous indication of a product with superior environmental performance. Present life-cycle indicators are difficult to assess even for experts, let alone the consumer. Moreover, such indicators are not related to consumer needs and hence are of little relevance. "Flooding consumers with such information may be a form of advertising, as in the case of questionable carbon footprint labels, but it has little to do with the provision of sound environmental advice that can assist consumers in their purchases", said ANEC Secretary-General, Stephen Russell.

The ANEC paper examines the shortcomings of the harmonised methodology, developed by the European Commission, for calculating the environmental footprint of products, services and organisations. The methodology has the intention to assess, display and benchmark environmental performance through an LCA approach.

ANEC recognises that LCA methodology has unique advantages in the analysis of the environmental performance of products. It allows a complete picture of certain environmental burdens associated with the product to be defined. However, LCA methodology features fundamental shortcomings, including reliance on numerous subjective choices, lack of adequate data and limited precision.

Hence consumer information, based on LCA indicators, is not helpful and, indeed, constitutes a step in the wrong direction. LCA alone cannot suitably characterise all environmental impacts. ANEC believes sound environmental assessments require a mix of tools, taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of each. The right indicators for the right products and the right organisations need to be identified using a broad range of assessment methods, with the decision made at the political level, after a consultation of all interested stakeholders.

A framework for the selection of indicators should be developed to translate environmental concerns into specific environmental requirements that apply to the European Union and the Member States, as well as at the organisational and product levels. The framework and choice of indicators must be linked to policy instruments and be applied in a consistent manner. To this end, the ANEC paper proposes a framework for the selection of environmental indicators.

ANEC regrets that the European Commission embarked on the use of a limited tool in LCA at the expense of established and often superior means. Hence we call on the Commission to pause and re-think its approach to environmental assessment.

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ANEC in brief

ANEC is the European consumer voice in standardisation, representing and defending consumer interests in the process of standardisation and certification. ANEC was set up in 1995 as an international non-profit association under Belgian law and represents consumer organisations from the 27 EU Member States, Croatia, and 3 EFTA countries. ANEC is funded by the European Union and the EFTA Secretariat, while national consumer organisations contribute in kind. Its Secretariat is based in Brussels.

More information:

<http://www.anec.eu/anec.asp?p=position-papers&ref=03-01.01-01>

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