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As concerns the 'climate neutral' notion: Preventing greenhouse gases is better than offsetting them

Federal Environment Agency publishes guide on voluntary compensation for greenhouse gases

Offers to compensate for greenhouse gases voluntarily abound: whether it be the 'climate neutral air trip' or the 'climate neutral bouquet of flowers', everything is possible. The idea is simple, namely to compensate for the climate gas emissions produced by products or services by saving the same amount somewhere else. Making sense of all these new possibilities is possible thanks to a new guide by the Federal Environment Agency (UBA) which includes a consumer check list. Consumers are advised not to be misled by the commonly used phrase 'climate neutral', says Dr. Thomas Holzmann, Vice President of the Federal Environment Agency, adding, "the activity to be compensated for (e.g. an air flight) can never be 'climate neutral' in and of itself, since it produces carbon dioxide emissions. Voluntary offsetting can not substitute for prevention of greenhouse gases. It is always better not to incur emissions in the first place."

Anyone who chooses one of the compensation opportunities ought to stay focused on whether calculation of emissions is realistic and that the quality of climate protection projects is guaranteed. "Suppliers are called upon to provide consumers with transparent and complete information", continued Dr. Holzmann. The key points on the UBA checklist are: does the supplier exhaust all means of compensation in his efforts to reduce the global warming effects of his offer? Has he, for example, optimised energy efficiency in production or switched to energy generated from renewable sources? Furthermore, has the climate protection project been checked by an independent expert and was the calculation of emissions reduction done according to internationally accepted standards?

As concerns compensation for air journeys, all of its effects on the climate must be taken into account by the provider. "The global warming potential of air traffic is not limited to carbon dioxide alone. Flights at altitudes above nine kilometres, that is medium and long-haul flights, also produce nitrous oxide emissions, and the cloud formation caused by the aircraft's soot

particles and water vapour also contribute to global warming”, said UBA VP Dr. Holzmann. Particular scrutiny of offers to offset avoidable high emissions, for example from motor vehicles, is warranted, as it is better to opt for an economical model.

The guide will show providers of compensatory services or ‘climate neutral’ products how to make a real contribution to climate protection efforts with their products and services. The guide defines the required quality standards for compensation offers as the UBA sees it, and it also explains how international climate protection projects work as well as introducing various types and standards in current certification.

The *Leitfaden zur freiwilligen Kompensation von Treibhausgasen* [Guide to voluntary compensation for greenhouse gases] guide (in German) can be accessed on the Federal Environment Agency website at:

http://www.dehst.de/cln_090/nn_1120342/DE/JI_CDM/JI_CDM_node.html?_nnn=true.

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