

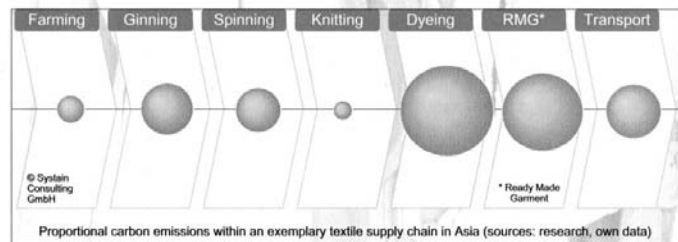
Clothing, carbon & communication

Communicating the Carbon Footprint is an effective tool for sustainable supply chain management

Textiles are sold in huge amounts. Textiles are shipped around the world. Textiles are manufactured inefficiently in developing countries. Two billion pieces of clothing are sold in Germany every year. One pair of socks travels up to 18,000 miles until it reaches the store. And the energy input only for ready-made-garment processes of one T-shirt (sewing, cutting, ironing) is equivalent to 40 Watt bulb shining 75 hours. Three remarkable figures that illustrate the ecological impact a simple T-shirt has.

ones, since dyeing dark colour consumes more energy? Or rather avoiding white colours because they are washed more often? Wearing no jeans with metallic buttons any more?

The carbon footprint may give the consumer an idea about some aspects of the climate impact of products. But making the right decision is complex. Furthermore, in most cases, fashion (not price!) will outweigh environmental benevolence. Thus, carbon footprinting



The carbon footprint of a T-Shirt amounts to about six kilograms of CO₂.

When enjoying your brand new T-shirt 'Made in Asia' in front of the mirror, you have caused around six kilograms of CO₂. That is not much compared to a flight to the Bahamas. However, related to the 300g that a single T-Shirt weighs, the result becomes staggering: the Carbon Footprint is 20 times heavier than the product! And this calculation does not even consider the climate impact by the use of fertilizers yet. To include the period of time when the T-shirt is in use and is regularly washed, dried and ironed would again double the carbon footprint.

This startling image may imply consequences for our consumption behaviour. But what to do? Searching for a shirt with a lower carbon footprint? Buying bright colours instead of black

and communication are not settled at the fashion store – it is within the company and the supply chain.

For example, any efforts to reduce the carbon footprint of a product will not have success as long as there is a high usage of airfreight. This causes 17 times higher carbon emissions than seafreight. However, shipping the textile takes three to four weeks. Addressing this issue in terms of sourcing processes and including buying departments, carrier and suppliers is a pivotal step for reducing the footprint. Combined sea-air transport may be a compromise between concerns of time and carbon footprint. It halves the emissions of airfreight.

The supplier may be approached to enforce energy efficiency by linking the carbon footprint to energy costs.

We have experienced that learning about the data collection for evaluating carbon emissions already makes people think about improving processes.

Looking at the carbon footprint, brands and retailers will realise where the major climate impact of their supply chain lies. Dyeing is the foremost source of CO₂ emissions in the textile chain. However, retailers often do not have direct business relations to dyeing mills. Approaching them requires a capable communication, for example by emphasizing the cost saving or marketing potential for the supplier.

Overall, one will get astonishing insights into the own chain by addressing the carbon footprint, such as the disturbing phenomenon of switching from natural gas back to coal fired boilers (sic!) in various supplier markets due to the increasing price level of gas there. The carbon footprint is a potent communication tool for sustainable supply chain management as it provides consumers with orientation to choose a climate friendly product. With regard to the supply chain it is a tool that reveals considerable potentials in saving costs and energy. By addressing these common incentives to the single players, the carbon footprint offers an effective approach to reduce carbon emissions.

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