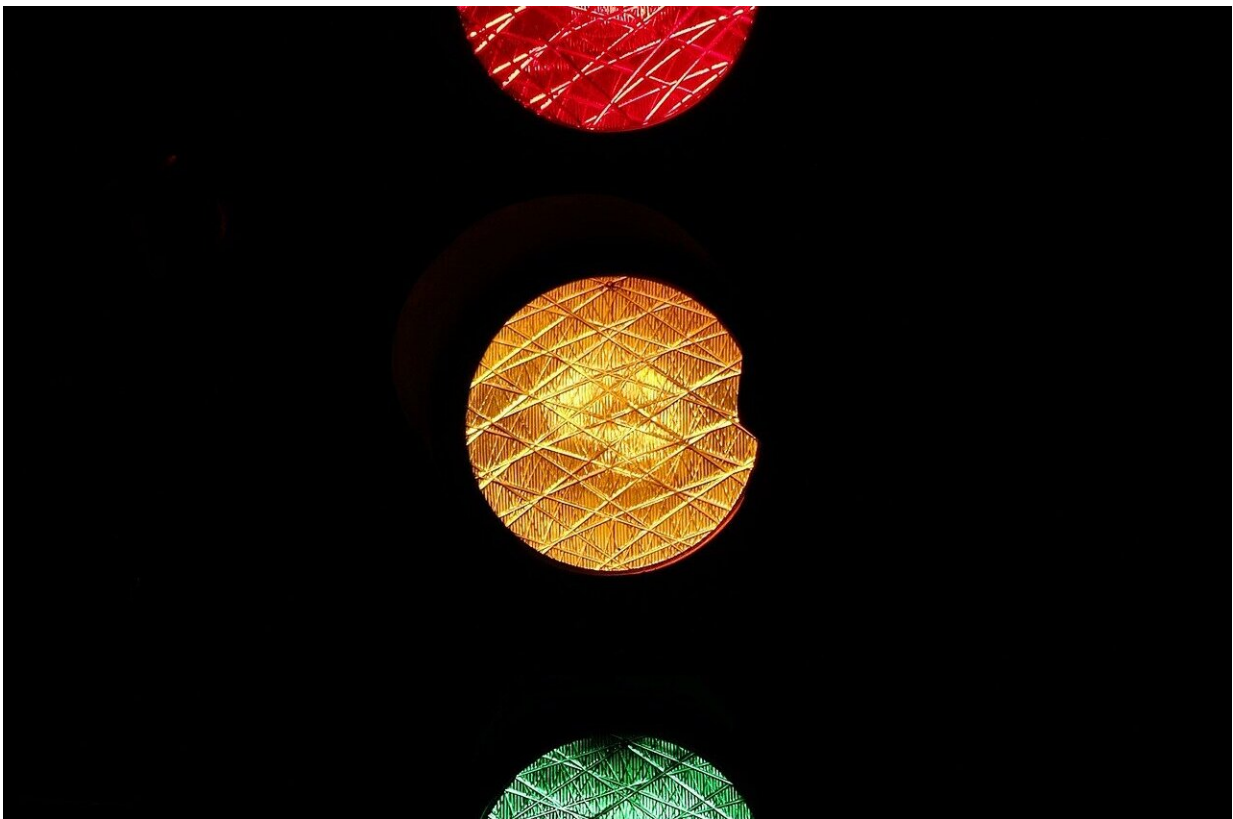


Public support traffic-light labeling for advertising high-carbon products like petrol cars and air travel

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There is public support for introducing traffic-light labeling and levies for the advertising of high-carbon products and services like petrol and diesel cars, meat and air travel, [new research](#) shows.

The policy report, launched by researchers from Lancaster University, provides the first clear insight into UK [public attitudes](#) towards the regulation of advertising of goods and services with high carbon footprints.

New traffic-light labeling of advertisements was the most popular measure with the public, followed by levies on advertisements for high-carbon products, the policy report details.

"There's previously been a lack of research on people's views on the advertising of products with high environmental impacts," said Professor Rebecca Willis, one of the authors of the report. "We wanted to find out more about what people in the UK think about advertising high-carbon products and services and we discovered that there is strong support for regulating their advertising."

Researchers gauged public opinions by assembling a "Citizens' Jury" of 25 people broadly representative of the UK population in terms of factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, education, concern about [climate change](#) and political affiliation.

The jury was tasked with learning, deliberating and providing recommendations on how, if at all, advertising should change to reflect the need to address climate change and to meet the UK's legal obligation to achieve Net Zero by 2050.

The Citizens' Jury's findings were then combined with additional polling

of 2,000 people.

After learning about the current system of regulating the environmental impact of advertising, all but one of the jury members wanted further measures to manage advertising of high-carbon products and services. Poll findings confirmed the view that the public broadly supports an introduction of new measures, with just 29% of people polled saying they want no changes to be made to advertising regulations.

The jury developed several proposals, with a labeling system being the most popular measure, with 20 of the 25 Citizens' Jury members supporting the proposal, as well as 69% of those polled in favor—including 44% showing strong support..

"Labeling was seen as an effective way of informing and educating the public about how to lower the climate impact of their consumption choices, while also raising public awareness and understanding of climate change," said Dr. Jacob Ainscough, Lancaster researcher and co-author of the study.

"People said they feel under-informed about the climate crisis and how they can contribute to addressing it and felt labeling could help provide information and clarity. They also saw it as a way of shaping corporate behavior, as companies would not like to have a red rating beside their products or services."

Research on prior efforts to regulate advertising, such as for tobacco, suggest comprehensive bans are the most effective for shifting consumer behavior. There has been growing interest in introducing bans for fossil fuel company advertisements and advertisements for high carbon products and services. However, participants in this research favored labeling over an outright ban on advertising high-carbon products with a focus on providing information through a labeling system.

A labeling system would still go beyond the measures currently used by the Advertising Standards Agency, which protects against misleading environmental claims or greenwashing, and would likely require new legislation.

The jury's second proposal of charges levied against advertisements of high-carbon products was supported by 11 jury members, with 10 saying they could live with it, and four opposing.

Jury participants felt companies would be incentivized to reduce emissions of their products to avoid levies and that money raised could potentially support green initiatives. Though concerns were raised about whether it would be difficult to administer or whether costs would be passed on to consumers.

The levy proposal received 66% support through the polling, including 39% showing strong support.

The researchers say the clear theme that emerged from the people involved in the study was that they felt a need for more information and education of the public around climate change and the climate impact of products.

However, advertising reform was not seen as a panacea by jury members. Other factors, such as cost and convenience, are also key drivers of consumption choice. Therefore, [advertising](#) reform needs to form part of a wider package of measures to improve public awareness and understanding about climate change and reduce carbon consumption, researchers say.

Professor Willis said, "What was very clear was that there is a real hunger for more information around the environmental impact of products. There's no clear messaging at the moment and people would

like to see [greater transparency](#), which is what they feel they would get from a well-designed traffic-light labeling system. Though the jury felt this would need to form part of a wider package of policy measures and public awareness initiatives to drive the transition to net-zero living."

More information: [Citizens' jury on advertising high-carbon products and services](#) (2024)

Provided by Lancaster University

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