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Calculating and Reporting Carbon Emissions Pre- and Post-Trip

Eco-Friendlier Travel

What effects do business trips have on the environment? This is a question that travel managers and management boards are forced to ask themselves more frequently these days. Travel is on the rise, with trips within Europe alone expected to double by 2030. At the same time, the industrial nations signing the Kyoto Protocol have committed themselves to reducing their emissions.

Carlson Wagonlit Travel, working for and together with its British client Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), has developed an approach to calculating the burden business trips place on the environment. The "CO_2 calculator" lets users calculate the carbon emissions from possible transportation alternatives (rail, air) before booking a trip. The CO_2 calculator is expected to be available for worldwide use by mid-year. Since the bookings are then made online, the travel data is available for post-trip reporting and annual overviews or other analyses.

Changing the travel behavior of its employees and civil servants is one way the British government wants to contribute to fulfilling Britain's Kyoto Protocol commitments, which entail 12.5 percent fewer greenhouse gases than in 1990 and 20 percent less CO_2 by 2010. All travel is thus being subjected to close scrutiny, starting with the question of whether a trip is really necessary, how many staff members need to take part, and an examination of how suppliers deliver their services and the contributions they make to environmental protection and sustainability. Whether or not a supplier's fleet consists of consumption-optimized vehicles is one example. Another example entails choosing an event venue close to a railway station or airport in order to minimize the distance to and from the meeting site.

Checking the options

A London employee has to attend a conference in Edinburgh. He is planning his trip and checking into the best way to get there. He can click on alternative travel options in the CWT Travel Portal. The CO_2 calculator shows him that the trip from London to Edinburgh (400 miles) takes one hour by plane and produces 96.4 kg CO_2 per passenger. By car the trip takes six hours, producing 71 kg CO_2 per car. By train it takes 4 hours, generating 11.9 kg CO_2 per traveler. And by bus the nine-hour trip would result in 9.2 kg CO_2 per traveler. Now it's just a matter of weighing the possibilities and checking the company's travel policy before deciding which mode of transportation to use.

Jonathan Green, responsible for eco-friendly travel at Defra and chairman of the Civil Service Travel Group, explains his approach: "It's all about changing travelers' behavior. To do so, we need products and services that show travelers what effect the various possibilities have on the environment in order to help them reach a responsible decision. With this joint initiative, we are also demonstrating how the travel industry can tackle the problem of the environmental impact of travel." He adds, "Weighing travel costs against emissions is gradually becoming a priority for shareholders as well, with corporate social responsibility and environmental issues gaining in importance."

This is also the argument made by David Tibbles, Global Product Director Online Booking and Environment at CWT: “The CO_2 calculator shows at a glance and thus very effectively how the individual can contribute to making travel more eco-friendly. We are currently working on refining our data and will in the future be able to show, for example, how the emission values for the various airlines look, depending on which aircraft is flown. And we are also trying to represent the hotel market.”

On the positive side, it is already noticeable that more and more organizations and companies are trying to improve their environmental scorecard. The CO_2 calculator now gives them a tool that allows them to examine their travel behavior and travel policy and adjust them accordingly. For example, the general obligation for employees to use public transportation instead of a private car wherever possible can be incorporated into the corporate travel policy. Changing the company fleet to low-emission vehicles is another possible consequence. Or making more use of video conferencing to replace travel.

Post-trip reporting

In addition to helping travelers make their travel plans, the CO_2 calculator also allows travel managers and company management to put together post-trip reports. They can call up a summary of the annual kilometers for air and train travel booked by the company. This data can be listed on a corporate level or broken down by regions/countries in order to analyze various aspects of travel behavior.

A clearly arranged table shows each destination; the sum of kilometers traveled; the CO_2, nitrogen oxides and other greenhouse gases produced; and the comparable values from the previous year.

There is also a third aspect to the calculator: it has an effect on suppliers. Carriers are trying to become “greener,” with optimized flight routes, reduced holding patterns, noise reduction when landing, and investments in consumption-optimized aircraft. This is coupled with the development of eco-friendlier fuels and improvements in fuel efficiency.

Climate Protection

The issue of climate protection and business travel is on the agenda of many companies today and in some cases, new approaches are already being put into practice. A quick survey conducted in March 2007 by the VDR (The Business Travel Association of Germany) shows that around one-third of companies are looking into the possibility of voluntarily obtaining CO_2 certificates as compensation for business trips. In one out of four companies, the topic is being discussed as a possible measure. Three percent are already practicing this and another 3 percent are planning for it in the near future. However, no less than 31 percent responded that they are not up-to-date on the latest information in this field.
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