

VANISHING CARBON EMISSIONS

Carbon calculator results cannot be compared – and only account for 60% of the total emissions in the Pacific

Container carriers are increasingly making carbon calculators available online. According to the carriers' own websites, the calculators are intended to allow shippers to calculate the CO₂ emissions associated with their individual shipments.

We decided to take a closer look at the carbon calculators, as well as the methodology underlying the calculators. We narrowed the analysis down to two specific points:

Can a shipper use the carbon calculators to compare the emissions across carriers?

If you add up the calculated emissions from every individual customer, will this match the total emissions from the carrier?

As we will outline, the answer

The carbon calculators

Presently, 7 of the major container carriers provide an online carbon calculator. The 7 carriers are: Hanjin, Hyundai Merchant Marine, NYK, Hapag-Lloyd, Hamburg Süd, OOCL and Cosco.

Why do these carriers provide a carbon calculator?

According to their own information, they each provide the calculator in order to allow a shipper to calculate his emissions associated with a specific shipment.

The carriers are very specific about this purpose. They each write the following about their carbon calculators:

Hapag-Lloyd: "EcoCalc allows you to calculate the emissions of your container transport from the beginning to the end of its journey"

WHO PICKS UP THE BILL?

A restaurant can seat 100 people. It costs them 5000 USD to produce and serve food. They decide to charge each guest 50 USD, and tell all customers that they will each be paying only for their part of the costs. Obviously, the restaurant will only break even if all seats are 100% full every day. Clearly, the restaurant would not set their unit pricing by dividing their costs by their maximum capacity. Yet this is what is happening when shippers are informed of their carbon emissions onboard container vessels. Unless all ships are full all the time, significant amounts of emissions are not apportioned to any shipper.