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## British Advertising Standards Authority asked to investigate “carbon-neutral” claims

Today, SinksWatch asked the British Advertising Standards Authority to investigate claims made by UK-based Phone Co-Op Ltd., which advertises “Climate Neutral phone calls” in the April 2004 issue of The Ecologist magazine. SinksWatch believes the advert is misleading and distracts public attention away from attempts to address the root causes of climate change.

In the advert, the Phone Co-OP states that “for every £10 you spend on calls we will offset 100kg of CO<sub>2</sub> through our partnership with Climate Care”. The Climate Care website ([www.climatecare.org](http://www.climatecare.org)) reveals that this is to be accomplished amongst others through tree planting in Uganda. Whilst forests play an important role in climate regulation, SinksWatch argues that these carbon storehouses cannot be traded to justify continued fossil fuel use: There’s a difference between planting trees, which benefits the climate, and planting trees as part of a programme sanctioning more fossil fuel burning, which does not. **It’s the difference between green action and greenwash.**

In the complaint, SinksWatch argues that “the possibility of verifiably quantifying the extent to which tree planting can compensate for CO<sub>2</sub> released in the burning of fossil fuels has never been established, due to uncertainty and scientific ignorance (see, e.g., Nilsson, S. et al., “Full Carbon Account for Russia”, Interim Report IR-00-021, IIASA, Laxenburg, Austria, 22 August 2000, p. 115, <http://www.iiasa.ac.at>). The possibility of verifiably quantifying the degree to which energy efficiency or hydropower projects are an improvement over business as usual, and thus entitled to claim they “offset” fossil fuel burning, is also fiercely contested (see, e.g., the current debates over “additionality” in the UN expert and business communities: <http://www.cdmwatch.org> and <http://www.cdm.unfccc.int/methodologies>).

Yet the “Climate Neutral” claim logically entails that such quantification is possible and verifiable: Climate Care states that “you can offset” the “z tonnes of carbon dioxide” you produce “by investing in Climate Care projects” ([http://www.climatecare.org/individuals/view.cfm?content\\_id=47EBOCA5-CBED-4AD8-AE95ADDAB124F9FD](http://www.climatecare.org/individuals/view.cfm?content_id=47EBOCA5-CBED-4AD8-AE95ADDAB124F9FD)). Nor are the current controversies over such claims in the expert literature anywhere communicated by the advertisement. Hence it is misleading according to the terms of CAP Code 7.1 and 49.3.”

**Watch this space for updates on the ASA complaint**

*SinksWatch* is an initiative to track and scrutinize carbon sink projects related to the Kyoto Protocol. The focus of *SinksWatch* will be on tree plantation sinks projects, particularly in areas where land tenure and land use rights are in dispute. The initiative, created by the World Rainforest Movement, is hosted by FERN.