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Environmentalists Cry Foul at Rock Stars', Polluting Companies' "Carbon-Neutral" Claims

Environmentalists are today launching protests against two British firms who say they are able to make their clients' products and services harmless to the climate through tree-planting and other activities.

The environmentalists charge that the claims of Future Forests and Climate Care to be able to render air travel, Coldplay CDs, the Glastonbury Festival and hundreds of other products and activities "carbon neutral" or "climate neutral" cannot be verified and distract public attention from attempts to address the causes of climate change. They are sending letters to dozens of the firms' clients asking them to reconsider their association with the companies.

"We are concerned that these companies are indirectly blocking the real solution to global warming, which is reducing and finally halting fossil fuel burning," said Heidi Bachram of Carbon Trade Watch, a group campaigning to curb global warming.

Burning coal, oil and gas produces carbon dioxide, one of the gases whose buildup in the atmosphere is warming the planet, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

“We need to see constructive actions such as a halt to government subsidies for oil development, rather than scientifically-disreputable schemes to ‘compensate’ for continued fossil fuel development, which merely leave an ever-worsening problem for future generations,” Bachram said.

"The idea that people can burn fossil fuels and then plant trees to clean up the carbon dioxide which results is simply wrong. This false ‘solution’ will merely keep people digging up oil and coal, instead of trying to shift to clean energy.”

Environmental and social justice groups including Carbon Trade Watch, SinksWatch, Soljuspax, worldforests, Clean Development Mechanism Watch, Rising Tide and The Corner House have co-signed the letters to over 200 Future Forest and Climate Care clients.

On the list are such large-scale polluters as BP, Volvo, Avis, Tetrapak and Amerada Hess, as well as other corporate heavyweights such as Barclays, British Telecom and Warner Brothers and celebrities including Atomic Kitten, Coldplay and Damien Hirst.

Said Jutta Kill, director of SinksWatch, an organization that monitors tree-planting projects claiming to “neutralise” greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels, "Pretending that a tonne of carbon stored in trees is the same as a tonne of fossil carbon ignores the very basics of the natural carbon cycle. There is enormous scientific controversy about how much carbon dioxide any given tree-planting can take out of the air, and for how long.”

Environmentalists like Kill agree that forests play an important role in climate regulation, as storehouses of carbon, but insist that they should not be traded for continued fossil fuel use.

“There’s a difference between planting trees, which benefits the climate, and planting trees as part of a programme sanctioning further fossil fuel burning, which does not” said Mandy Haggith of Worldforests. “It’s the difference between green action and greenwash.”

Future Forests’ and Climate Care’s claims to be able to “offset” their clients’ carbon dioxide emissions through extra energy efficiency or hydropower projects also came under the environmentalists’ fire.

“To be able to say you’ve ‘neutralized’ the emissions from your car by investing in efficient stoves or machinery, you have to be able to calculate exactly how much of an improvement over ‘business as usual’ you’re making,” said Larry Lohmann of the campaigning group The Corner House. “But there are huge disputes raging over these calculations,” Lohmann said. “Experts are coming up with estimates that differ by orders of magnitude.”

Environmentalists are also today lodging formal complaints with Britain’s Advertising Standards Authority about the two companies’ claims.

At issue are two advertisements by Future Forests, one in a Tower Records outlet and one in Barclays Bank, and an advertisement by The Phone Co-Op in *The Ecologist* magazine citing Climate Care services.

The firms' advertisements are misleading, the environmentalists say, since they do not acknowledge the "fierce" scientific controversy surrounding the capacity of tree-planting and other projects to "offset" carbon emissions.

The British Code of Advertising requires that an advertisement reflect any "significant division of scientific opinion" about its claims.

For more information: www.futureforests.com, www.co2.org, www.sinkswatch.org, www.tni.org/ctw, www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/document/#climate.

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The Future Forests website features a graphic of a scale "balancing" an airplane and a tree, a car and a wind turbine, and a house and an efficient light bulb. See <http://www.futureforests.com/>.

2. Future Forests' clients include

- Corporate heavyweights such as Sainsbury's, BP, Daihatsu, British Telecom, Fiat, Mazda, TRW Lucas Aerospace, Avis, Swiss Re, Orange, Price Waterhouse Coopers, Volvo, Tetrapak, Amerada Hess, J. Walter Thompson, John Lewis, AON, Thameslink, DHL, London Electricity, London Luton Airports, Marriott Hotels, National Express, RAC, Railtrack, SC Johnson, Tower Records, Whitbread, Spud U Like, Tower Records, Marriott Hotels, Audi, Trafalgar Hilton, Ben & Jerry's and Virgin Cars.
- Media companies such as Channel 4, Harper Collins, the *Independent on Sunday*, the *Sunday Times*, Warner Brothers, Beacon Press, Film Four, MTV Europe, Cherry Red Records, Distinctive Records, Red Flag Recordings.
- Banks and building societies including Barclays, Royal Sun Alliance, Norwich & Peterborough Building Society and the Yorkshire Building Society.
- Celebrities such as Kitaro, Pet Shop Boys, Pink Floyd, Ridley Scott, Simply Red, Atomic Kitten, Coldplay, Damien Hirst, Spandau Ballet and Anita Pollack MEP.
- "Green" companies such as Body Shop, Greenergy, Whole Earth Foods, GreenFleet, Organic Xpress, Simply Organic; "green" events such as the Glastonbury Festival and the Mind Body Spirit Festival; environmental groups such as the International Union for Nature and Nature Conservation; and the alternative magazine *Resurgence*.
- Official bodies and events such as the World Economic Forum, the World Summit for Sustainable Development, UNED – Stakeholder Forum, Britain's Environment Agency as well as the public service union UNISON.
- Fulham Football Club and the Groucho Club.

Climate Care's clients include Car Hire Online, who tell customers that carbon dioxide emissions from their first 450 miles of driving the firm's rental automobiles have been "offset". Other products offered with Climate Care CO₂ "offsets" are:

- Co-operative Bank's mortgages and car loans.
- The Phone Co-op's services, which come with an offset of one tonne of CO₂ "for every £100 you spend".
- Holiday flights booked with The Adventure Company, Andante Travels, Discovery Initiatives, The Expedition Company, Greentours, High and Wild, South American Experience, The Last Resort, Whale Watch Azores, Explore Worldwide, Footloose Adventure Travel, Island Holidays, Journey Latin America, Naturetrek and Trips Worldwide.

3. For an indication of the controversies surrounding the possibility of calculating the capacity of tree-planting and other forestry projects to "offset" carbon emissions, see, e.g., Nilsson, S., Shvidenko, A., Stolbovoi, V. 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>. Anderson, D., Grant, R., and Rolfe, C., *Taking Credit: Canada and the Role of Sinks in International Climate Negotiations*, David Suzuki Foundation, Vancouver, July 2001; Read, D. et al., *The Role of Land Carbon Sinks in Mitigating Global Climate Change*, The Royal Society, London, July 2001; Jackson, R. B., Banner, J. L. et al., "Ecosystem carbon loss with woody plant invasion of grasslands", *Nature* 418, 8 August 2002, p. 626-626; Hoch, G., Richter, A. et al., "Non-Structural Carbon Compounds in Temperate Forest Trees", *Plant, Cell and Environment* 26, 2003, pp. 1067 – 1081; Oren, R. et al., "Soil Fertility Limits Carbon Sequestration by Forest Ecosystems in a CO₂-Enriched Atmosphere", *Nature*, 411, 2003, pp. 469 – 472 (see <http://www.nature.com/nsu/030721/030721-6.html>); Van Vliet, O. P. R., Raaij, A. P. C. et al., "Forestry Projects under the Clean Development Mechanism", *Climatic Change* 61 (1-2), 2003, pp. 123-156; Field, C. and Hungate, B., "Study Warns against Carbon Storage through Extra Forest Planting", *Science*, 28 November 2003; Tenner, C., "Verification of the Kyoto Protocol: A Fundamental Requirement", VERTIC Briefing Paper 00/6, October 2000; Jonas, M., Nilsson, S., Obersteiner, M. et al., "Verification Times Underlying the Kyoto Protocol: Global Benchmark Calculations", Interim Report IR-99-062, IIASA, 1 December 1999; Jonas, M., Mayr, B., Schidler, S. et al., "Land-Use Change and Forestry in Austria: A Scientific Assessment of Austria's Carbon Balance in Light of Article 3 of the Kyoto Protocol", Interim Report IR-98-028, IIASA, May 1998; Carrasco Letelier, L., Eguren, G. et al., "Preliminary Study of Prairies Forested with Eucalyptus sp. at the Northwestern Uruguayan Soils", *Environmental Pollution* 127 (1), 2002, pp. 49-55; Chen, W., Chen, J., Liu, J. et al., "Approaches for Reducing Uncertainties in Regional Forest Carbon Balance", *Global Biogeochemical Cycles* 14, 3, 2000; Schulze, E.-D., Wirth, C., Heimann, M., "Managing Forests after Kyoto", *Science* 289, 22 September 2000; Pearce, F., "Smokescreen Exposed", *New Scientist*, 26 August 2000; Falkowski, P., R.J. Scholes, Boyle, E. et al., "The Global Carbon Cycle: A Test of Our Knowledge of Earth as a System", *Science* 290, 12 October 2000; Williams, A.A.J., Karoly, D.J. and Tapper, N., "The Sensitivity of Australian Fire Danger to Climate Change", *Climatic Change* 49, 2001; Saleska, S. R., Miller, S. D. et al., "Carbon in Amazon Forests: Unexpected Seasonal Fluxes and Disturbance-Induced Losses", *Science* 302, 5650, 28 November 2003, pp. 1554-1557; Pearce, F., "Violent Future", *New Scientist*, 21 July 2001; Richards, K.R. and Andersson, K., "The Leaky Sink: Persistent Obstacles to a Forest Carbon Sequestration Program Based on Individual Projects", *Climate Policy* 1, 2001; Alig, R., Adams, D., McCarl, B., "Ecological and Economic Impacts of Forest Policies: Interactions across Forestry and Agriculture", *Ecological Economics* 27; Obersteiner, M., Ermoliev, Y., Gluck, M., et al., "Avoiding a Lemons Market by Including Uncertainty in the Kyoto Protocol: Same Mechanism — Improved Rules", Interim Report IR-00-043, IIASA; Jonas, M., Nilsson, S., Shvidenko, A. et al., "Full Carbon Accounting and the Kyoto Protocol: A Systems-Analytical View", Interim Report IR-99-025, IIASA; Fitzsimmons, M. J., Pennock, D. J. et al., "Effects of Deforestation on Ecosystem Carbon Densities in Central Saskatchewan", *Forest Ecology and Management*, 188, 1, 5 February 2004, pp. 349-361; Pyne, S. J., *World Fire*, University

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