

EAST END LIVING

Climate Change Conversations: A Consumer-Centric Approach to the Climate Crisis



ICEMAN LOGOS ON PACKAGING REPRESENTING 100% AND 50% CARBON-NEUTRAL PRODUCTS

BY FRANK DALENE

I have long been saying that harnessing the power of market forces is the only way we will be able to reverse climate change — and that doing so starts with empowering the consumer to make greener choices.

Over the past couple years, major organizations such as the World Economic Forum (WEF) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have started to express the same belief. “The case for a consumer-centric approach is ever more important now for two reasons,” Helena Leurent, director-general of consumers international for WEF, wrote in January 2023. “One: Consumers increasingly want to be active agents of change in the energy, food and broader climate crisis. Our research on solutions to the cost of living and climate crisis found 78% of our members calling for sustainable food production and 68% for energy. Two: Leaders now recognize how important consumer action is in meeting the climate crisis.”

The fact is, most consumers want to make the environmentally conscious choice and are increasingly inclined to buy products they perceive to be greener. A 2021 study by the Economist Intelligence Unit spanning 54 nations across the globe, commissioned by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), found that, “The popularity of Google searches for sustainable goods increased by 71% between 2016 and 2020. According to a 2019 McKinsey & Company survey, 66% of all respondents (and 75% of millennial respondents) said that they consider sustainability when making a purchase.”

Additionally, consumers want to purchase from companies they perceive to be more environmen-

tally responsible. “Consumers also want to know about corporate values, especially when it comes to sustainability,” the Economist report finds. “Over 6,000 people who took part in a 2019 survey by Hotwire were asked if they had ever switched products or services because a company violated their values. Almost 50% had done so, and the number one reason was to support products or services that ‘protect the environment.’”

These new reports are not only uncovering the increased interest in and demand for greener and more sustainable products and services, they also demonstrate just how vital a role the consumer can, should and must play in combatting the climate crisis.

The effects of consumer demand are already being seen. “Entire industries are changing as a direct result of increased consumer demand for more sustainable goods and services,” the Economist report finds. For example, in the fashion and textile industry, the second largest polluter after the oil industry, “Over 50% of C-suite executives surveyed by EIU say that consumers are driving the focus on sustainability in the fashion and textile industry, followed by environmental activists (35%). As a result of this pressure, 65% of the businesses surveyed have committed to sourcing sustainably produced raw materials, and 60% now collect data on supply chain sustainability.”

A greater focus on consumer demand can have an enormous impact. IPCC’s 2022 report “Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change” found that, “Demand-side mitigation and new ways of providing services can help avoid, shift and improve final service demand. Rapid and deep changes in demand make it easier for every sector to reduce

greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the short and medium term.” The effects of demand-side changes, the report states, could be immense: “The indicative potential of demand-side strategies to reduce emissions of direct and indirect CO₂ and non-CO₂ GHG emissions in three end-use sectors (buildings, land transport and food) is 40–70% globally by 2050.”

The IPCC report offers many suggestions on how to harness demand-side power to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. But I would like to propose one more, which would not only support IPCC’s suggestions but would also exponentially increase their results: the implementation of ICEMAN.

Leurent writes that, “Consumers face consistent technological, infrastructural, financial, regulatory and knowledge-related barriers, which stand in the way of transformative action.” ICEMAN would help diminish, even eliminate, those barriers.

Most consumers want to make environmentally conscious choices, but they often lack sufficient information to do so quickly and easily. ICEMAN’s Carbon Factor Label Index provides consumers with that information in seconds. A consumer can look at a product and immediately know how green it is; and armed with that information, consumers will be inclined to choose the product they *know* is better for the environment.

ICEMAN offers a mechanism to channel the power of the consumer into reducing greenhouse gasses by applying established science and mathematics to calculate the greenhouse gas emissions of any product and translate that measurement into a simple attribute that consumers can understand at a glance. With ICEMAN, consumers would have a science- and math-based attribute by which they could objectively and accurately assess the carbon footprint of every product.

This will increase consumer demand for products that are proven to have a lower carbon footprint, which will in turn drive manufacturers and businesses to make their operations and products closer to carbon neutral in order to maintain their competitive advantage. As manufacturers and businesses create more low-emission and carbon-neutral products, greenhouse gas emissions will be reduced faster and in greater amounts — as demonstrated by the IPCC’s rigorous study.

If a consumer-centric approach is critical to halting the climate crisis, as these reports make clear it is, implementing ICEMAN is the quickest, most direct way to harness that power and turn the tide on climate change.

Frank Dalene, the bestselling author of Decarbonize the World: A Market-Based Solution to the Climate Crisis, is president and CEO of Telemark Inc., a construction services business he cofounded with his father in 1978. Over the past four decades, Telemark has become known for being a national leader, embracing the latest in energy efficiencies. Dalene is innovating the manner in which companies can assess their carbon footprint. Through his ICEMAN (International Carbon Equivalent Mechanism Attributed to Neutrality) methodology, companies can get an accurate snapshot of their product’s carbon emissions on a standardized scale. Dalene has presented keynotes across the world on sustainable construction, carbon neutrality and ICEMAN. Learn more at frankdalene.com.

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