Project-based carbon footprinting in construction

Your feedback is requested to promote effective cost-effective carbon footprinting methods.

Summary

CIRIA is co-ordinating a programme[1] that aims to assess the feasibility of identifying a widely acceptable method for construction contractors to effectively measure and report their *project-based carbon footprints* to clients and principal contractors.

The first stage of the programme involves gathering information on current practice across the construction industry. We welcome responses to our questionnaire which can be accessed via www.carbonconstruct.com

The findings will feed into a workshop to asses if there is a widely accepted method that will allow contractors to effectively measure and report project-based carbon footprints to clients and principal contractors.

Introduction

Increasingly, clients and principal contractors are requiring contractors to provide information on the planned 'carbon footprint' of their contribution to the construction process – this we will refer to as 'project-based carbon footprinting'.

Feedback from contractors confirms that the number - and diversity - of these requirements/ enquiries is increasing. These naturally include fossil energy use (such as site energy use or transport) but may also include the 'embodied carbon' in installed and other construction materials.

The 2010 Low Carbon Construction, Innovation and Growth Team (IGT) Report lists the following stages in the carbon emissions attributed to our industry.

Design	**Materials or product manufacture**	**Distribution**	**Assembly on site**	In-use	Refurbishment / Demolition

We expect the scope of project based carbon footprinting to include at least some of the stages in bold (above) though our survey may reveal a broader scope.

Aims of this programme

First stage – this survey

The first stage of this programme aims to identify current practice and other key issues linked to project based carbon footprinting.

As such, our survey (www.carbonconstruct.com/surbey.htm) will gather evidence on current practice and identify any methods, tools and datasets that are commonly being used, plus other factors that respondents consider to be important. The results of our survey will then inform an industry workshop later this year that will consider:

- the current boundaries for project-based carbon footprinting exercises
- current practice in terms of methods
- the degree to which different methods can provide consistent (or comparable measures), and
- the scope for a widely recognised project-based carbon footprinting method(s).

We therefore welcome your response to our questionnaire, based on your experiences and approaches to carbon footprinting – whether as a client, a principal contractor or sub-contractor.

It is our intention to make this programme inclusive, and we will maintain contact with those who reply to the questionnaire, and other key stakeholders.

Second stage – post survey

The second stage of our programme will be a workshop which will focus on the possibility of identifying a widely accepted method that would allow contractors to effectively and consistently measure and report project-based carbon footprints to clients and principal contractors.

A widely accepted method would help to avoid a proliferation of such methods across the industry, with the attendant problems of extra cost and time to produce information, together with inefficiency and confusion. One widely accepted industry method would also greatly assist with measuring trends and industry benchmarking.

Based on the survey and the industry workshop, the second stage would aim to identify a project-based carbon footprinting method that:

- is as simple as possible, yet fit for purpose
- reflects current good/best practice if possible
- would be very widely accepted

Ideally, we want to identify a method (as opposed to specific tools) that could get widespread industry support and thus become 'common currency' within construction. However, this challenge is a pan-industry one. We believe strongly that any approach needs to recognise any methods already being applied effectively across various parts of the construction industry.

As such, we will not be looking to:

- invent a brand new carbon footprinting method simply to add to others that may already exist
- identify one method or tool, to the exclusion of others.

References

1. This programme is supported by the ECA and HVCA, in association with The Construction Industry Research and Information Association (CIRIA).
2. The UK Low Carbon Transition Plan: National Strategy for Climate and Energy, DECC, 2009
3. Low Carbon Construction, Innovation and Growth Team (IGT) Report, HM Government, 2010