

You can't be carbon neutral by ignoring the emissions f...

Published: January 13, 2026, 11:17 pm

As a result of the work I have been doing on [sustainable cost accounting](#) I have become pretty familiar with the [Greenhouse Gas Protocol](#):



The greenhouse gas protocol splits greenhouse gas emissions into three categories. Thankfully, [they're pretty easy to define](#):

I've reproduced the Protocol's own description just to make clear that they really do think there's not much to this.

Except that there is. And that's because right now business has decided for reasons all of its own that only Scope 1 and 2 emissions are of importance. Mark Carney's [Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures summarises its reporting requirements pretty succinctly as follows](#):

Note that category (b). It says that Scope 3 need only be disclosed 'if appropriate'. And what defines 'appropriate'? Nip up to the top of the column and you will find it is when management think that it is 'where such information is material'.

And as it turns out, almost no one does seem to think Scope 3 is material. So we end up with the absurd situation where airports claim they are carbon-neutral because they ignore the emissions from the planes that fly from them and coal mines can make the same claim because they say someone else burns the coal that they mine, and they claim that's got nothing to do with them when glaringly obviously that's untrue.

My points then are very simple ones.

First, any accounting standard for greenhouse gas emissions that does not require Scope 3 disclosure is incomplete. In fact, it's not a standard worth calling by that name because it ignores a crucial issue.

And second, anyone who claims they are carbon-neutral and ignores their Scope 3 emissions is making a claim that is simply not true.

And we need to say both of these things time, after time, after time.