
This is the **accepted version** of the letter:

Anderegg, William R. L.; Blanchard, Libby; Peñuelas, Josep; [et al.]. «Climate-targets group should rescind its endorsement of carbon offsets». Nature, (April 2024). DOI 10.1038/d41586-024-01271-6

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Corporate climate targets group should avoid endorsing carbon offsets

William R. L. Anderegg, Libby Blanchard

University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA. anderegg@utah.edu

We and many of our colleagues with expertise in forest carbon cycling, climate policy, and carbon markets have multiple serious concerns about the recent statement from the board of trustees of the Science-Based Targets initiative (SBTi) on allowing companies to use voluntary carbon market offsets to address scope 3 emissions targets. Scope 3 emissions are those a company is indirectly responsible for, and are often the largest category of companies' emissions.

Numerous studies have found large and pervasive problems in many carbon credit protocols and programmes (e.g. West et al. 2023). Most current carbon offsets are not robust or capable of neutralizing fossil fuel emissions.

SBTi has ongoing processes to synthesize the evidence surrounding carbon offsets, whose findings should be released and followed. SBTi decisions should be based on a public, peer-reviewed systematic review of the state of the evidence for the effectiveness of carbon offsets across different sectors and the effectiveness of carbon offsets on companies' decarbonization plans and progress.

We call on SBTi to rescind its statement until concerns surrounding carbon offsets are adequately addressed and to ensure that future decisions on scope 3 emissions will be approved by scientists and technical advisors. Any other approach would severely undermine SBTi's credibility and jeopardize the organization's mission.

William R. L. Anderegg,

Libby Blanchard

University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT, USA (anderegg@utah.edu)

And [32 Undersigned Scientists](#)

Citation

West, T. A., Wunder, S., Sills, E. O., Börner, J., Rifai, S. W., Neidermeier, A. N., ... & Kontoleon, A. (2023). Action needed to make carbon offsets from forest conservation work for climate change mitigation. *Science*, 381(6660), 873-877.