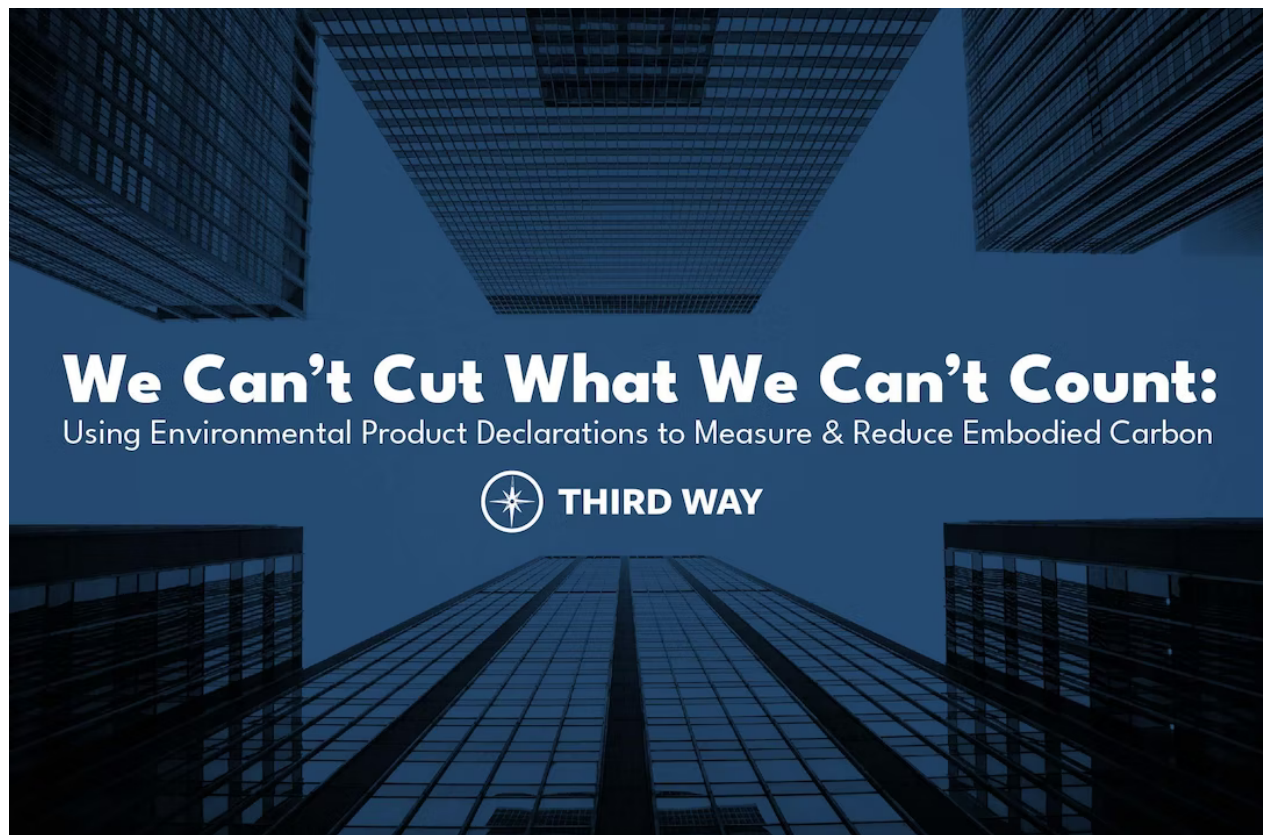


We Can't Cut What We Can't Count: Using Environmental Product Declarations to Measure and Reduce Embodied Carbon



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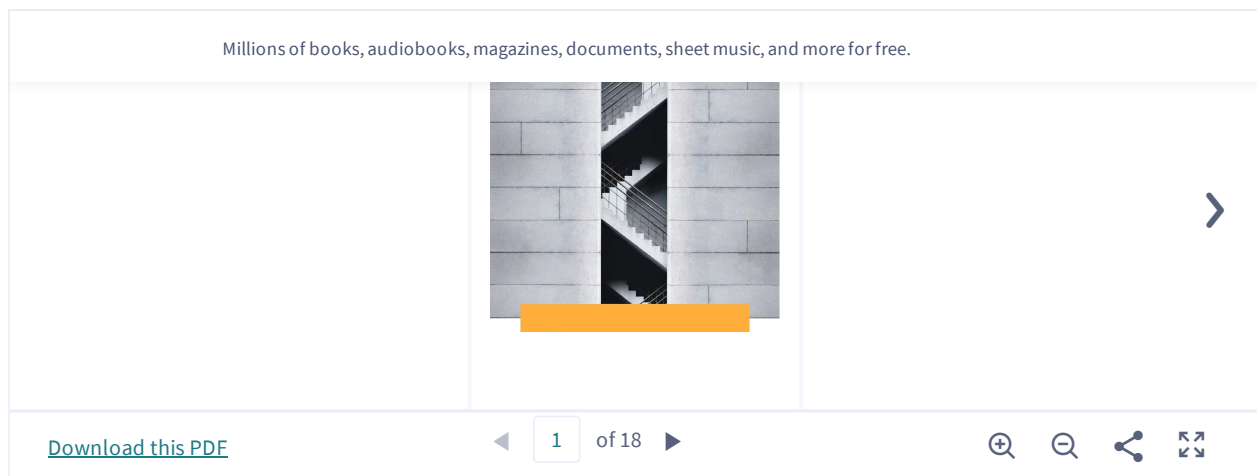
When it comes to reducing carbon emissions, we can't cut what we can't count, and some of the biggest opportunities to cut carbon are getting lost in the shuffle. With the right tools, we can fix this problem.

Common construction materials used to build our homes, offices, roads, and bridges are a significant source of greenhouse gases, with concrete, steel, and aluminum alone accounting for 18% of global emissions.¹ In order to encourage the use of lower-carbon materials, we need a reliable way to compare products. Fortunately, a disclosure tool called an environmental product declaration (EPD) has emerged in recent years to help measure the climate impact of products and enable consumers to buy cleaner.

An EPD is a report that quantifies the “embodied carbon” of a product, or the emissions generated from mining the raw ingredients, transporting them, running the kiln or furnace to produce the building material, and then using it to construct a road or building. It allows the manufacturers of these materials to report standardized, third-party verified data and enables sustainability-minded buyers to make more informed purchasing decisions. In fact, recent cases have shown that even requiring the disclosure of EPDs, without any further action, reduces embodied emissions by 20%. ²

This kind of carbon transparency is foundational to reducing industrial emissions. And with a growing number of major corporations and governments around the world demanding cleaner products, EPDs will give manufacturers better access and advantages in these markets. The federal government can keep US industries competitive and advance its climate goals at the same time by providing manufacturers with the resources needed to create EPDs.

To better understand how EPDs are already contributing to more sustainable building practices, Third Way conducted a series of interviews with a broad range of companies, including manufacturers, engineers, architects, sustainability consultants, and building owners. Their diverse perspectives are captured in our report “Understanding the Impact of Environmental Product Declarations.”



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ENDNOTES

1. Mori Rothman. “Can Concrete, a Major CO₂ Emitter, Be Made Greener?” PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, 8 Aug 2021, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/can-concrete-a-major-co2-emitter-be-made-greener>; Christian Hoffmann et al. “Decarbonization challenge for steel.” McKinsey, 3 Jun 2020, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/metals-and-mining/our-insights/decarbonization-challenge-for-steel>; Renee Van Heusden et al. “Why addressing the aluminum industry’s carbon footprint is key to climate action.” *GreenBiz*, 16 Dec 2020, <https://www.greenbiz.com/article/why-addressing-aluminum-industrys-carbon-footprint-key-climate-action>.
2. Based on data provided to Third Way from Building Transparency.