Buy Appliances From Us! With Free UK Delivery! Online Shopping IS Environmentally Friendly!

Online shopping is more environmentally friendly than driving to the shops. That’s according to a new report from the Logistics Research Centre at Heriot-Watt University.

The team found that, on average, having goods delivered to your home by parcel carrier generates significantly less carbon dioxide than making a special trip to the shops to buy the same item.

James Roper, CEO of the Interactive Media Retail Group, the internet retail trade body, said: “It has long been assumed that the overall efficiency improvements inherent in e-retailing make it more planet-friendly than going out to the shops, but this factual, wide-ranging research nails the point. Now that Heriot Watt University has proven the general principle, further research into the subject of consumer goods distribution is certain to follow in order to discover precisely what aspects are more efficient and to what degree, and how still greater efficiency improvements can be obtained".

The research compared the carbon footprints of online and conventional shopping for small goods such as books, CDs, cameras and household items. The work focused on the final stage in the delivery process, the so-called ‘last mile’, when goods are either delivered to the home or customers travel to the shops to collect them in person.

It was found that a typical van-based home delivery produced 181g CO2, compared with 4,274g CO2 for an average trip to the shops by car. An average bus trip by a shopper produced 1,265gCO2. In other words, when a customer drives to the shops and buys fewer than 24 small, non-food items per trip or travels by bus and buys fewer than 7 items, home delivery is more environmentally-friendly.

Internet retailers have long claimed that shopping online is better for the environment. However Professor Alan McKinnon, Director of the Logistics Research Centre, and one of the authors, pointed out that: “While this research suggests that home delivery is less carbon intensive, neither it nor a conventional shopping trip can be said to have an absolute environmental advantage. Someone using public transport at peak times and buying goods in bulk can match the emissions per item of home delivery”.

The critical factors in the calculation are the number of items purchased per shopping trip, the choice of travel mode, the probability of the consumer being at home to receive the goods and the way in which unwanted goods are returned. The figures quoted above make no allowance for failed home delivery or the return of unwanted products, though these complications are addressed in the report.

Prof. McKinnon continued: “The willingness of shoppers to combine shopping with other activities and to group purchases into as few shopping trips or online transactions as possible is clearly important to minimise the environmental impact of both conventional shopping trips and home delivery”.

He added: “Online retailers and home delivery companies can also apply various measures to enhance the CO2-efficiency of their logistical operations and gain a clearer environmental advantage”.

The Heriot-Watt report emphasises that both consumers and suppliers need to be better informed about the environmental implications of their respective shopping behaviour and distribution methods.

Source: IMRG