

Recommended measures to reduce business flights at Eawag

Flyaware interest group

2019-11-28

A call for action

“It is critical to immediately begin reducing net CO₂ emissions and to eliminate them to zero worldwide between 2040 and 2050 at the latest.”

— Scientists for future

This statement from the ‘Scientists for Future’¹ initiative was signed by 44 out of 87 (50.6%) Eawag group leaders and department heads. The director and deputy director of Eawag have signed this statement as well. Thus, the majority of the Eawag leadership is in agreement with this statement and is aware of the urgency of taking measures to reduce emissions.

One of the most effective ways for scientific institutions to reduce their climate impact is a drastic reduction of business flights. More than half of greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) of Eawag’s sister institution ETH Zurich are caused by business trips. Of those **93%** are due to business flights². Technical alternatives to substantially reduce GHG emissions of airplanes are not foreseeable for the near future. It is thus of immediate concern to reduce the number of flights.

Eawag is a research institution recognized worldwide and therefore has the potential to act as a role model for other research institutes by taking on its institutional responsibility for further reducing CO₂ emissions.

This report is a call to the Eawag leadership to act. We propose nine concrete sets of measures to reduce Eawag’s CO₂ emissions related to business flights. To aid in decision-making, We provide a list of highly accepted and highly impactful measures as priority targets for implementation.

We conducted a survey among all Eawag employees, in which roughly half of all employees (232) participated. Employees were asked to evaluate the set of measures we present in this report. Given the high response rate, our results are highly likely to adequately reflect the views of Eawag employees on the topic of flying and the proposed measures.

The scientific evidence for man-made climate change and its dangers is robust. We believe that you as (environmental) scientists and members of the directorate want to overcome the knowledge – action gap and support change here at Eawag.

¹ <https://www.scientists4future.org/statement-en-und-es/>

² <https://ethz.ch/flugreisen>

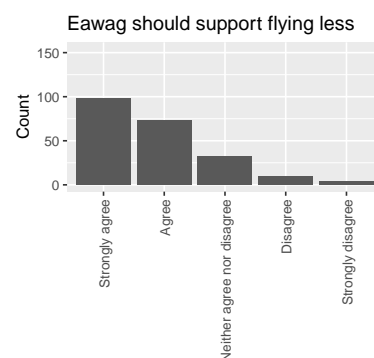


Figure 1: Employees of Eawag overwhelmingly support Eawag taking measures to aid in reducing business flights

What measures should Eawag take?

We suggest the following list of measures for Eawag to take right away.

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- *Official Statement (Eawag Directive)*
- *Intranet page*
- *Showcasing video conferences*
- *Train travel as official policy*
- *Compensation of train travel*
- *Compensate all flights*
- *Double the compensation*
- *Internal reduction targets*
- *Improved database*

One of the most effective ways to reduce GHG emissions from flying is the reduction of long-distance flights⁴. Thus, we strongly recommend to prioritize a measure acting on long-distance flights. However, since the quite stringent measure we initially proposed was very controversial among Eawag employees, we propose the directorate adapt the measure to improve acceptance.

- *Limit long-distance flights*

Categorization of measures

We categorized measures based on their acceptance in the survey and their expected impact in terms of reducing GHG emissions. Acceptance was split into three groups, based on the distribution of acceptance⁵ among Eawag employees⁶. Expected impact and expected costs are based on an estimate within the flyaware group and as such only represent an initial prior. We welcome further discussion on these points.

We suggest to categorize measures into four groups:

- **High acceptance:** These measures are universally supported by Eawag employees. They are mostly relatively low-cost. We recommend their immediate adoption.
- **Very disputed:** The most controversial, yet generally most impactful measures. We recommend to forego these for the moment, except for the measure on limiting long-distance flights. Here we recommend to adapt the relatively stringent measure we propose.

³ The complete set of measures as presented to Eawag employees in the survey can be found at the end of this report. Clicking on individual measures links to the specific measure.

⁴ see eg. Jäckle, S. Eur Polit Sci (2019) 18: 630. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-019-00220-6>

⁵ However, it needs to be kept in mind that no single measure was rejected by a majority of survey respondents

⁶ The distribution of variables can be explored interactively at: https://marioangst.shinyapps.io/flyaware_survey/ Survey data and analytical procedures can be accessed at https://github.com/marioangst/flyaware_survey