



## [An alternative strategy for the alternative energy: Ditch Verizon?](#)

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The typical western post-industrial human being has two roles to play in society: citizen and consumer. Both offer the opportunity to exert power and influence, and whether we like it or not, neglecting one over the other invariably gives competing interests an opening. On matter climatological, most campaigners have been focused in recent times on the political sphere, and understandably so: legislation and regulatory proposals are on the table in the U.S., Europe, Australia and elsewhere. But there are those who are keeping an eye on the marketplace, where it may also be possible to effect change through the threat of consumer boycotts. The latest corporate entity to come into the crosshairs is ...

[Verizon Communications](#). At first glance, this may seem like an odd choice. Verizon does not burn coal (at least, not as part of its business portfolio), or drill for oil, or contribute much in the way of emissions from moving things around. It is, after all, an information-transmission company, one that arguably has played a leading role in reducing the need for transportation by helping build the hyperconnected society that is rapidly supplanting the real one. While all those Internet servers may be responsible for as much as 2 or 3 percent of global greenhouse emissions, what demand are they supplanting? James Lovelock has argued that personal computing devices will play a key role in reducing global energy demand, although that may be bit on the wild-eyed side for the foreseeable future. Still, isn't this all a bit off-target?

Not according to a [growing list of activist organizations](#) who are unhappy with Verizon Wireless's decision to sponsor the "Friends of America" pro-coal rally in West Virginia over the long weekend. Verizon is just one on [a long list of sponsors](#), but it's the only name that's easily recognizable by a substantial portion of the American population. The presence of Rogers Petroleum Services and the Kentucky Coal Association is hardly noteworthy, but one of the nation's top cellphone service providers is.

This is why Verizon's participation in a rally led by climate-change deniers like Massey Energy CEO Don Blankenship has prompted [consumer action alerts like this one](#) from the Center for Biological Diversity. It's also a rare opportunity for consumers to express their dissatisfaction with climate and energy policies at the corporate level. There are precious few options when it comes to the supplier of your electricity. For most Americans, you can either use the local utility,

or find the substantial resources to go off the grid. That's it. But with cell phones, there are choices to be made.

How effective will such campaigns be? On one hand, Verizon has upwards of 90 million customers. On the other, as anyone who's tried to choose a cell service recently knows, adding corporate responsibility to the selection criteria may just be enough to throw you over the edge. We already have to figure out which service offers the best coverage in the area in which we'll most often be using our phone; evaluate the merits of each company's available technologies (i.e., do we want an iPhone so badly we're willing to go with AT&T despite its abysmal 3G network); compare and contrast rate plans; and investigate customer service reputations.

And now they want us to eliminate one of the major contenders because it sponsored a rally in West Virginia in support of a technology that supplies half the country's electricity? Well, yes, they do.

It will take a significant number of potential subscribers and existing customers with contracts about to expire to make a difference. But as climate change activists in the U.S. watch legislative action on the already horribly compromised ACES bill, the only game in town, slide farther and farther down the congressional agenda, and as they extrapolate from the dwindling commitment evident among their Democratic allies to health insurance reform, can you blame them for looking elsewhere for leverage points?

The real answer, of course, is pressure must be maintained on all fronts. In addition to ordinary citizens threatening their representatives with reprisal at the polls and cellphone providers with loss of contracts, we also need scientists to start speaking up loudly and often. That would also serve as a signal to the corporate world that support for the status quo could prove more costly than joining the movement in support of clean energy supplies.

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