

## Housewares Goes “Green”

Green cars, green buildings, green roofs and green energy. Americans are becoming increasingly concerned about being “green” to protect the environment. The Internet has a myriad of websites devoted solely to the environment and sustainability issues. At [www.greenerchoices.org](http://www.greenerchoices.org), *Consumer Reports* addresses energy, climate change, agriculture, waste and dangerous chemical substances and connects the information to products. It also includes energy calculators and links to local energy, water, and sewage treatment services.

In retail, Wal-Mart recently unveiled “Sustainability 360”—a company-wide emphasis on sustainability extending beyond Wal-Mart’s direct environmental footprint to engage associates, suppliers, communities, and customers.

“Sustainability 360 takes in our entire company—our customer base, our supplier base, our associates, the products on our shelves, the communities we serve,” said Wal-Mart President and CEO Lee Scott. “And we believe every business can look at sustainability in this way. In fact, in light of current environmental trends, we believe they will, and soon.”

Part of Sustainability 360 is “Global Innovation Projects,” a challenge for Wal-Mart associates and suppliers to start thinking about how to remove non-renewable energy from the products the company sells.

“Perhaps the most far-reaching opportunity we have with our suppliers is a simple idea with potentially profound consequences,” said Scott. “Just think about this: What if we worked with our suppliers to take non-renewable energy off our shelves and out of the lives of our customers? We could create metrics and share best practices so our suppliers could make products that rely less and less on carbon-based energy.”

As part of the initiative, Wal-Mart will work with suppliers to reduce packaging by 5 percent by 2013—an effort equal to removing 213,000 trucks from the road, and saving approximately 324,000 tons of coal and 67 million gallons of diesel fuel per year.

The 2008 International Home + Housewares Show ([www.housewares.org](http://www.housewares.org)) will cover sustainability and energy efficiency through several seminars and a new display. On Monday, March 17, consumer expectations regarding green products will be discussed during “In the Green: Connecting With Environmentally Conscious Consumers” featuring Jennifer Ganshirt, managing partner at Frank About Women

([www.frankaboutwomen.com](http://www.frankaboutwomen.com)), and Fabian DeGarbo, director of sustainable packaging at Whole Foods Market ([www.wholefoodsmarket.com](http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com)). The program begins at 7:30 a.m. in the Grand Ballroom/S100 in the South Building. *Design Directions: Going Green*, a new exhibit in the Lakeside Center Level 3 Lobby, will feature examples of sustainable packaging and innovative uses of eco-friendly materials in product design. The exhibit will include video presentations about the selected products and an inspirational display of the latest green materials available for future product development.

As ecological and social issues become more important than ever before, a new role is opened for product design in housewares. Designers and manufacturers now seek ways to make products perform well while not cluttering the environment for future generations. The Housewares Design Center Theater in the Lakeside Center Level 3 Lobby will feature more than a dozen presentations on how the movement has affected housewares design and how the industry has responded. The sessions will take place on Sunday, March 16 and Monday, March 17, 2008.

One speaker on sustainability and design will be JohnPaul Kusz, founder and associate director, Center for Sustainable Enterprise (<http://www.stuart.edu/cse/>). “Whether they are designers, design managers or educators, many in the design community are motivated by the conviction that design’s primary purpose is to help make the world a better place,” says Kusz . “Today, a product that looks great but doesn’t perform reliably or fit the population of its intended users is not considered a good design.”

Kusz says that consumers are demanding more information about how a product has been made. “Dell, for example, is asking hard questions and getting very candid answers from its customer base,” he says. “There is a new open architecture in design that will make the system more transparent and will provide much tighter feedback loops which will be beneficial to the customer. It’s cross-designing with your customers in ways we haven’t seen before.

“I also see potential with carbon footprint numbers, with manufacturers providing that information on a package so a consumer can make a more informed purchase decision and so government bodies can legitimately and effectively tax products based on their carbon content,” he adds.

According to Kusz, in late 1991 The Design Principles of Environmental Stewardship were generated through the efforts of several members of the American Design Council, a coalition of 12 major U.S. design

organizations (including the Design Management Institute). The principles are conceptually broad to allow integration into a variety of design-related activities, ranging from architecture and product design to the graphic arts. They focus on important elements to consider as design continues to evolve: safe products and services, protection of the biosphere, sustainable use of natural resources, reduction of waste and increase of recycling, wise use of energy, reduction of risk, and sharing of information.

Another design firm that has embraced sustainability is Item Group (<http://www.itemnpd.com/>), a large industrial design and product development firm that developed Green Card, a checklist system that has been integrated into Item's product development process. The Green Card gives designers, engineers and clients the opportunity to consider sustainable options at each stage of the development process.

The system has led to major companies making critical decisions that have significantly increased the "greenness" of their product. Other clients are now asking Item Group to develop specific green versions of existing successful products.

Design firm Touch 360 ([www.touch360.com](http://www.touch360.com)) is actively working on "green" products, including green chopsticks for China. Claire-Juliette Beale of the firm is working with Greenpeace on the chopsticks, because China's use of disposable chopsticks costs 25 million trees each year. As part of an awareness campaign, Greenpeace asked Touch 360 to design reusable, portable chopsticks and packaging, to provide an alternative to existing products and to help change consumer behaviors. Design constraints included cost, stringent environmental objectives and a very tight schedule.

Beale said that market and user research, managed by Beale mostly in China and in collaboration with Greenpeace and Touch 360's Beijing associate Daniel Koo, included observations and interviews in a variety of environments to provide insights into cultural and social issues, use patterns and perceptions. The end product is made of steel and rosewood, and it has a simple mechanism that allows easy cleaning and a compact form factor. Concurrently, the team has been working on follow-up on an innovative family of products to be launched in 2008. The product recently won an award for Best New Eco-Friendly product from M8, and Beale will speak about the product in the Housewares Design Theatre on Sunday, March 16.

Beale says, "The notion of green is complex. As designers we have to find a balance between the environmental issues and the business issues, including the balance sheets of manufacturers. It's an interesting

challenge for all parties involved. After all, making sustainable products needs to be a sustainable business model.”

How does a company meet sustainability goals? One way is to have sustainability reporting, says Chad Upham, design principal/CEO, Covive ([www.covive.com](http://www.covive.com)), who notes that there are many healthy benefits of sustainability reporting, and that it helps an entire company look at products and their future strategies to set up company-wide programs. Upham and his company conduct sustainability reporting, and help companies implement sustainability strategies and prioritize the best steps for developing green products. Upham will speak on corporate sustainability reporting at the Show.

“If you are a manufacturer, this means looking at each of one of your product lines and making a long-term plan to bring them all up to speed,” Upham says. “If you are a service organization, it means looking at all the things you buy, and making a plan to change their specification and seek out products that are nearer to being 100 percent environmentally sustainable.”

Upham says that many corporations are “unhealthy” in their social and environmental performance, and only recently have begun to take a good look at their social and environmental health, disclosing the findings publicly, and developing strategies to get better. One standard to use is the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) “G3”—third generation—Sustainability Reporting Guidelines, which has become the global standard for reporting on social and environmental performance.

Upham notes that as of July 2007, nearly 20 percent of U.S. Fortune 500 companies have published a corporate sustainability report or citizenship report utilizing the GRI guidelines. “Customers are asking for this,” he says. “People want confidence in that the product they have is not harming their children.”

The green movement is not only driven by retailers and consumers, but also by the news media, according to A.J. Riedel, senior partner of the Riedel Marketing Group ([www.4rmg.com](http://www.4rmg.com)). “When it starts to gain media attention, the governmental policies change and customers begin to influence the manufacturers.”

But will consumers pay more for a “green” product? “Overall, this movement is a huge challenge for manufacturers because customers expect performance and the product has to do the same job,” Riedel says. “The price of a green product is an even larger challenge. Consumers may pay 10 percent more, but more than that will be a difficult sell.” She also suggests that the retail stores will drive the movement, because it can give them a

competitive edge. Riedel will chair a discussion by IHA's Consumer Advisory Council in the Housewares Design Theatre on Monday, March 17.

Mark Dzierzk, vice president of industrial design for LAGA/One80 Design ([www.one80design.com](http://www.one80design.com)), says consumers *will* buy green products. "Look at Whole Foods as an example, which has had 500 percent growth over the past five years," he says. "You can't *not* shop at Whole Foods and get that they are about sustainability." Dzierzk will speak about the emotional currency of sustainability in the Design Theatre.

"We have turned a corner," Dzierzk adds. "Sustainability is an emotional driver to purchase in every category. Targeting and understanding the emotional drive is the new killer application. Sustainability has gone from a nice element to one of the key drivers to move a product off of the shelf. Companies that have a serious sustainable element in their product create a premium and force other companies to 'catch up.'"

According to Suzanne Shelton, CEO of the Shelton Group ([www.sheltongroup.com](http://www.sheltongroup.com)), it's all about segmentation. "There are certain segments of the industry that will dive in with both feet and certain ones that will not. The button you have to push is different for each segment of the population." She adds that there is much consumer confusion as to what is truly a "green" product, and that a 100 percent corporate culture in an organization can help to diffuse the confusions.

She adds that in the past few years, consumers have been bombarded by the marketing messages of companies jumping on the green-friendly bandwagon. "People are becoming much more inquiring about the bill of green goods being sold to them—not only in terms of is it as 'green' as what they say it is, but also 'does it matter enough to me to pay extra?'"

According to Shelton, "energy-efficient" is consistently equated to 'more expensive' in the minds of consumers. "What consumers are often fatigued about in 2007 is the price differential—or at least the perceived price differential," Shelton said. "But saying 'save money' when advertising an energy-efficient product isn't necessarily good enough. Our research shows that consumers want proof." Shelton's presentation in the Design Theatre is titled, "Cutting Through the Green Clutter: What Consumers Really Want to Hear."

Jackie DeLise of Branding By Design emphasizes that the green movement is not going away, but only gaining ground each day. "Green is becoming more of an industry standard with retailers, and Wal-Mart led the

way,” says DeLise, who will speak on the “ABC’s of Sustainable Packaging and How Brands Respond to Emerging Sustainable Lifestyles.”

“The entire landscape of retail has changed with big box retailers and their new green standards, and you are only a partner as long as you adhere to them,” DeLise says. “Sustainability should be front and center and part of every business decision a company makes. Sustainability is the next industrial revolution.”