

## Consortium helps consumers ID which common brands are most sustainable

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(Phys.org)—As you do your shopping this holiday season, would it help to know exactly which toys, electronics, food and other items are better for the environment? A prominent researcher at the W. P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University is helping to develop a system that will tell retailers, manufacturers, and eventually consumers, about the sustainability of many of the products we buy every day.

Professor Kevin Dooley is research director of The Sustainability [Consortium](#), an impressive group administered by Arizona State University and the University of Arkansas, featuring big-name-members, such as Unilever, [BASE](#), MillerCoors, Mars and [Walmart](#), with combined revenue of more than \$1.5 trillion. The consortium is developing criteria that will allow you to easily identify which products are the most sustainable in their categories, based on factors like emissions, [labor practices](#), [water usage](#) and waste creation. The consortium's efforts were recently named among 10 "world-changing ideas" that are "radical enough to alter our lives" by Scientific American, and this year, the consortium's work really vaulted forward.

"We have now established the critical issues and best areas in which to improve more than 100 types of the most common products—everything from electronics and toys, to food, drinks and personal care items," says Dooley. "We're helping businesses focus on the most important [sustainability issues](#) and giving them a way to measure and share their progress in making products better. This year, we were able to make rapid progress, thanks to the intense efforts of our staff and the

stakeholders involved."

In addition to big advances in creating these tools for companies to use, the consortium also finalized a huge partnership this year. The Consumer Goods Forum is a commercial trade organization with more than 400 retailers, manufacturers, service providers and others as members worldwide. Working with this group will help the consortium to create a single global framework for sharing information between retailers, manufacturers, suppliers and consumers.

The consortium also announced expansion into China, thanks to a \$2 million grant from the Walmart Foundation. The consortium will build relationships with Chinese manufacturers and retailers, exchanging information about best practices. It will also help implement a training program for Chinese factory managers and owners, utilizing regional knowledge about social and environmental issues. In other global efforts, the consortium hosted visits and events in Chile and Japan this year, and it's strengthening ties with a university in Europe.

Dooley says making products more sustainable is getting even more important, as the number of middle-class consumers worldwide keeps growing. We're creating and consuming more goods – using more energy and disposing of more waste in the process.

"It's vital to show companies that sustainability and profits aren't mutually exclusive," says Dooley. "Investing in sustainability can actually help boost a firm's bottom line. Sustainability efforts involve streamlining processes, using less energy and creating less packaging. All of this can help save both money and the environment."

Dooley adds that 40 to 50 percent of environmental impacts can be traced to the life cycle of consumer products sold in retail stores. Therefore, making better choices about which products we buy and how

those products are manufactured are truly significant. Dooley notes that some criteria developed by The Sustainability Consortium are already influencing major companies.

"For example, Walmart now requires all suppliers of laptop computers to ship those computers with energy-saving settings as the default," says Dooley. "Other retailers are already using the consortium's criteria to choose areas in which they can ask their suppliers to improve. Hopefully, we're helping many companies consider more sustainability aspects when they're selecting suppliers and drawing up contracts."

Dooley teaches sustainability in the W. P. Carey School of Business' supply chain management programs, consistently ranked top 10 nationwide. He points out the pioneering way The Sustainability Consortium is integrating the efforts of members across academia, government, private companies and non-governmental organizations. The group is conducting practical research that can affect mainstream consumers around the world.

"The current focus of the consortium is to make the existing system of creating and using products as efficient as possible," says Dooley. "As industry capabilities mature, we and others will also start looking at how we can consume less, reuse more, change products to services, and make items last longer overall."

In 2013, the consortium will start working on criteria for clothing, footwear, textiles and many different durable goods like bicycles and hardware. To learn more about The [Sustainability Consortium's](http://www.sustainabilityconsortium.org) efforts, visit [www.sustainabilityconsortium.org](http://www.sustainabilityconsortium.org).

Provided by Arizona State University

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