Abstract

The world is quickly becoming less sustainable, despite rapid innovations in so-called “green” technology, processes, and certifications. Much has been achieved in the last 40 years, but meeting the needs of 9-billion will require that we innovate the way we produce, consume, and recycle materials. We just don’t have the best materials, processes, production systems, or incentives in place to achieve this at scale today. We desperately need the help of scientists to adjust our chemical outputs to create materials that don’t toxify our air, water, soil, each other, or the products we use every day. We also need to systems designed to truly ‘upcycle’ materials back into commerce just as nature does, rather than ‘downcycle’ them into a park bench or speed bump.

Biography

Mike Werner is chemist, engineer, and sustainability strategist with Haworth, a global office furniture manufacturer and will discuss "Green chemistry and sustainable product design.” Mike has given up the life of a pharmaceutical chemist and has dedicated himself to eliminating toxic chemicals from consumer products instead of creating them. He also advocates for design thinking as a platform for addressing corporate sustainability and driving business solutions. He has served as a sustainability advisor to the Department of Homeland Security and the National Institute of Building Sciences.

When asked about the future of business growth, he responded: "Because we expect to see significant global changes in consumption, resource availability, and volatility over the next 15 years, our businesses must find ways to decouple growth from constrained resources. Innovation must start today if we are to have sustainable, profitable business."

Mike recently spoke at TEDx Macatawa on the role of green chemistry in the circular economy. Watch his talk here: http://youtu.be/zBd8u-LRH_w