

Influencing Sustainability: One Chemist's View

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The concept of sustainability has been around for a long time. Ancient peoples realized the importance of only taking what they needed from the environment to support their way of life. In modern times, we possess a global perspective that our species has the capacity to exceed the Earth's ability to support human development. Clearly, the strain on our natural resources and environment has never been greater with over seven billion of us living on the planet. Such pressure has created a global sustainability mega trend whose sometimes confusing message permeates our modern life. Science, technology, economics, government regulation, and public opinion are all drivers in a complex web of interactions that are leading us into an uncertain future. Chemistry's prominent place in the history of human development is undeniable, and the sustainability of the chemical industry is an important issue to address. Can the chemical industry, and we as chemists, influence a more sustainable outcome? This presentation describes one chemist's experience in the industry over the past 25 years, and examines current and emerging efforts to ensure chemistry's role in meeting the sustainability challenge.