

Opposite of Built-In Obsolescence: Experts Urge Improving Product Quality for the Sake of Future Generations

ScienceDaily (Sep. 9, 2011) — Manufacturers should be encouraged to **make products** that last longer, retain their retail value and are more readily recyclable after use, according to **green consultant** Peter Lang. Lang is co-founder of the charity Green and Away and a former **Adviser to the Green Deputy Mayor of London**. Writing in the *International Journal of Green Economics*, **he suggests** sustainability will only be achieved by promoting growth in high-quality goods and the **phasing out** of "shoddy" products.

"Society should be seeking growth in the quality of goods and services," **he says**, **"This change** from quantity to quality is necessary because Western industrialised economies **are already** consuming beyond the planet's carrying capacity."

Lang explains that without changes in taxation and regulation, there will **not be a cultural** shift towards such high-quality goods that last longer, are more easily repaired and **maintain their value** on the second-hand market. Eradicating the manufacturing culture that leads to **stickers proclaiming** "No user serviceable parts" on electrical goods and plastic cases that either have **no screws or cannot** easily be opened for do-it-yourself repair, under the guise of "health and safety" **represents an important** part of this. Without this and other changes, we will continue to dispose of electrical **goods, furniture, kitchenware, household goods** and other products prematurely.

"The suspicion is that manufacturers are confident that their goods will be **reliable for a year**, but not much longer," says Lang. "The cost of the product when new seems to make **little difference**: a £50 video recorder has a one year warranty, as does a £15,000 car," he adds. "A **cynic might be grateful** that our planet takes all of 12 months to circle the sun: if it was less then **warranties might be shorter too**." Longer warranties and guarantees seem only to apply to things like cutlery, **which tend to lack** moving parts or any likelihood of falling into disrepair without particularly **severe handling** and use.

He suggests that changes that are both financially and also culturally attractive **will encourage** consumers to opt for better-quality products and so nudge the manufacturers to **improving their goods**. Essential to such endeavours is strengthening existing "fit for purpose" legislation **that protects** consumers. He believes that products should either be designed "for life" or at the **very least** come with a label indicating life expectancy so that consumers can make a more informed **decision as to** which product to buy.

"To some these changes may seem harsh, but the crises of climate change, water and air pollution, and waste from manufacturing are already becoming huge," says Lang. If we can change the manufacturing and consumer culture to choose high-quality over shoddy, longer lasting and more easily repaired, then we might again achieve a society that appreciates this quality and reduces dramatically our demands on raw materials, energy and waste facilities. Who knows, we might one day see a market in antique kettles and televisions that still function when plugged in.