



## GREEN PRODUCTS ROUNDTABLE

Keystone Center for Science & Public Policy

### SUMMARY

The complexity of “what makes a product green?” and the proliferation of eco-labels and green product claims has created considerable market confusion and, some would argue, an impasse to further progress toward sustainability. In response, several robust efforts are underway to: (1) build the scientific foundation for greening products, (2) assist manufacturers in measuring and communicating their progress, and (3) engage and train buyers on how to use their purchasing power to realize environmental and public health goals. However, the lack of a central, organizing body to strategically align these efforts toward mutual goals, and to fill key gaps in tools and guidance, reflects a missing link in truly transforming the market toward a more sustainable economy.

The Green Products Roundtable (GPR)’s mission is to advance product sustainability by providing leadership and guidance to improve the decision-making capabilities of product manufacturers, institutional buyers, businesses, and consumers. The GPR is a facilitated stakeholder group comprised of approximately 35 members representing different perspectives, including manufacturers, retailers, purchasers, distributors, certifiers, and other experts and thought leaders. The group is organized voluntarily and funded by membership dues as well as foundation and government grants.

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Green Products Roundtable has built consensus around key marketplace issues in the past two years, including:

**A Glossary** of commonly used terms and agreed-upon definitions currently in use in the green marketplace.

**A Framework for Differentiating Greener Products** and identifying and mapping significant linkages among “hot spots,” lifecycle impacts, and attributes of ‘green’ products.

**A Green Marketing Pledge** to accelerate the adoption of FTC’s Environmental Marketing Guides and other similarly relevant environmental marketing guidance documents.

**Organizational Preferred Practices.** The GPR developed a set of preferred practices for building and maintaining credibility for different categories of actors involved in environmental marketing claims, criteria development, and eco-labeling.

**The Launch of a New Organization.** The Green Products Roundtable believes that the most effective and appropriate way to advance product sustainability would be through the formation of a new organization to collaborate with and further amplify the many fruitful efforts already in existence within the green products marketplace and to provide guidance and direction.

## GPR MEMBERS

The American University, Office of Sustainability  
The Ashkin Group  
Big Room, Inc.  
City of Santa Monica, CA  
DEKRA  
Erb Institute, University of Michigan  
Five Winds International  
Greencurement  
Green Electronics Council  
Green Seal, Inc.  
GreenGuard Environmental Institute  
ISEAL Alliance  
The National Association of State Procurement Officers  
Office Depot  
The Overbrook Foundation  
Responsible Purchasing Network  
Shaw Industries, Inc.  
UL Environment  
University of Minnesota Institute on the Environment  
Weyerhaeuser

### Collaborating Organizations

Environmental Defense Fund  
Rainforest Alliance  
World Resources Institute  
World Wildlife Fund

### Government Liaisons

General Services Administration  
U.S. Department of Energy  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
National Institute of Standards and Technology

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### ABOUT THE NEW ORGANIZATION

The to-be-named organization will continue the GPR's mission to advance product sustainability by providing leadership and guidance to improve the decision-making capabilities of product manufacturers, institutional buyers, businesses, and, eventually, consumers. The new organization will facilitate:

1. Better information about green products standards and labels;
2. Tools to help institutional purchasers (and eventually consumers) make better decisions about which products to choose; and
3. Higher standards for products, which translates into a healthier environment.

### Key Principles

The organization will seek to be a credible, well-governed entity that determines preferred product environmental standards, labels, and certifications on a sector-by-sector basis.

- It will build upon efforts in the federal government to develop guidelines for selecting standards and eco-labels -- using evaluation criteria that are sufficiently robust to differentiate standards and labels.
- It will use a rigorous, open, balanced, and transparent process for developing such criteria.
- It will have and maintain a balanced governing structure that is composed of diverse thought leaders from multiple sectors, that does not allow for "capture" by any one segment of the marketplace, and that contains checks and balances in its funding, decision-making and operations.
- It will be a model for openness and transparency in its decisions and operations.

The intent of this entity is not to develop standards or labels or to duplicate the efforts of other key players. Rather, its goal is to collaborate with and further amplify the many fruitful efforts already in existence within the green products marketplace and to provide guidance and direction where it is needed.

### The Framework as the Engine for the New Organization

The "Framework" will, in effect, become the engine that drives critical judgments of the new organization. When it is completed and populated with the relevant data, the Framework will help clarify when a product with specific environmental attributes is meaningfully "greener" than typical alternatives in the product category, and on what grounds. Eventually this work will connect product category environmental analyses to assessments of: how the standards and labels were developed, how conformity assessment is determined, and how well eco-labels and certifications are currently managed.

The Framework creates a bridge between three currently disconnected ways of thinking about greener products: (a) lifecycle analyses & hazard assessment, (b) attributes, and (c) standards and eco-labels. By cross referencing product attributes, standards, and eco-labels with lifecycle impacts we can come to better conclusions on greener product preferences. Its goal is to enable the new organization to offer clearer guidance to standards developers, eco-labeling organizations, and institutional purchasers.

### What Next?

A model business plan for this new organization was developed in early 2012. The Green Products Roundtable (GPR) members are recruiting intellectual and financial partners for the new organization. The group anticipates launching the new organization in mid-2012.

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### ABOUT THE KEYSTONE CENTER

The Keystone Center is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that brings together today's public, private and civic sector leaders to advance solutions to society's most challenging environmental, energy, and public health problems. We also provide students and educators with the 21st Century skills required to effectively approach questions faced by the next generation.

