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## It Takes a Global Sustainability Movement

John C. Dernbach



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# *It takes a global sustainability movement*

**T**he negotiated outcome of this summer's U.N. Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro has been rightly criticized as a

## **DELAWARE VOICE**

**JOHN C. DERNBACH**

lukewarm response to the enormous challenges and opportunities of sustainability. Yet few of the 50,000 people from all over the world who attended the conference represented national governments; they represented nongovernmental organizations, corporations, local governments, academic institutions, religious communities and themselves.

They represent an emerging sustainability movement – both in the United States and elsewhere. It is the future of this movement, as much as any future conference, that will determine the fate of human civilization on this planet. But it needs to grow quickly in strength and influence.

This emerging movement is different from other current

movements. It is not trying to occupy anything. It is not simply political. In fact, many of us are, without even knowing it, part of the movement.

If we recognize we need to do something to address the reality of the growing population, economies, and environmental degradation and climate change around the world, and look for ways to reduce our own environmental impact, then we are part of the movement.

If we purchase local or organic food, take the bus or train instead of drive, or use a more fuel-efficient car when we have to drive, then we are part of the movement.

If we try to save energy or water at work, and strive to produce environmental, social and economic benefits at the same time as part of our job, then we are part of the movement.

If we recognize environmental protection and restoration can also create jobs and business opportunities, and we advocate, design, implement, participate in or simply sup-

port such efforts, then we are part of the movement.

If we are tired of the regulation-versus-antiregulation rhetoric that passes for environmental debate in this country, vote for candidates only if they demonstrate a genuine understanding that the environment (including a stable climate) provides everything else we care about it, or urge political leaders to make more sustainable decisions, then we are part of the movement.

If we recognize we are here for only a short time, that we have an ethical, moral and even religious duty to live our lives in a way that respects the world in which our grandchildren will live, and find ourselves taking more and more actions like those mentioned above over time, then we are part of the movement.

This movement is growing every year, and the evidence is all around us. Though public opinion polling on the environment is mixed, there is increasing growing public support for more sustainable outcomes – including renewable

energy and fuel-efficient cars. In addition, more sustainable decisions are easier to make now, and they are more attractive than they were previously. To build or renovate a green building, for instance, one only needs to follow a certification checklist, and not figure it out from scratch.

Government has responded, in part, by adopting laws and policies that support economic development, job creation and environmental protection. Examples include energy efficiency, renewable energy and organic food.

This is a movement that includes not only environmental groups but also many corporations, labor unions, farmers, lawyers, colleges and universities, local governments, architectural firms, religious organizations and engineers. They have each worked out specific and practical things that can be done to move in a more sustainable direction, including not only green building certification but also corporate sustainability reporting standards, more

energy-efficient products and services, sustainability classes and programs, and community-supported agriculture programs.

At hundreds of side events all over Rio de Janeiro, these people told their stories, shared what works and what doesn't work, proposed or committed to specific actions, and other ways demonstrated their willingness and ability to make specific things happen in specific places.

These people and organizations represent our best hope for a sustainable future. As this movement grows, our national governments will respond by finding the political will to act with the vigor and intensity that sustainability requires. But the movement begins with each of us, wherever we are, and whatever we do.

John C. Dernbach is Distinguished Professor of Law at Widener University in Harrisburg, Pa. He is the principal author of "Acting as if Tomorrow Matters: Accelerating the Transition to Sustainability" (Environmental Law Institute Press), which was just published.