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“The past few months have seen blue-chip companies tripping over themselves to go green.”

The goal is to create dense urban areas that generate more power than they consume through smart building techniques and solar technology—a high-profile demonstration of cradle-to-cradle principles, if it actually happens.

To date, though, McDonough has made more concrete progress with corporate clients, including BASF, Nike, PepsiCo, and Ford Motor Co., which famously commissioned the architect to oversee a top-to-bottom overhaul of its historic River Rouge plant in Dearborn, Michigan.

In fact, the past few months have seen blue-chip companies tripping over themselves to go green. General Electric vowed to improve the energy efficiency of its operations by 4% a year and double its revenues from relatively clean products to \$20 billion by 2010. Wal-Mart, which has contracted with Lovins and RMI for advice, has unveiled plans to double the fuel efficiency of its new trucks, cut greenhouse-gas emissions from existing stores by 20%, and develop a model green store. Energy giant BP just unveiled a

bling out of more agile, adaptable small and midsize companies.

Take outdoor-clothing maker Patagonia. Ten years ago, it led the pack in switching to 100% organic cotton; now it's asking folks to return their old Capilene underwear (yes, they'd like you to wash it) to be recycled into new garments.

In a similar vein, Hartmann & Forbes, which makes handwoven window coverings from sustainably grown grasses and bamboo, just launched a program to take them back at the end of their useful lives. Q Collection, an upscale furniture maker, outflanks competitors by eschewing formaldehyde, polyurethane, and flame retardants. GDiapers are made of reusable cloth with flushable, compostable inserts. IceStone is a glossy countertop material of recycled glass and concrete.

Perhaps no other area is seeing as great a flurry of development as clean energy. Solar cells are shrinking, wind turbines are getting more efficient, and hydrokinetic energy—from the natural movement of water—is being tapped as never

forests and Appalachian mountaintops leveled, or the lives cut short by poisons and pollution. There is already enough carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to guarantee at least some climatic disruption.

The European Union and U.S. states and cities are picking up some of the legislative and regulatory slack, but at the national level here, action to address these problems has been anemic at best and counterproductive at worst—a collective failure of will that could come back to haunt us. But if McDonough and company are right, the real engine of environmental progress will turn out to be not government action but the imagination and entrepreneurial spirit of thousands of market-savvy, environmentally minded innovators.

As GE CEO and newly minted ecovangelist Jeffrey Immelt is fond of saying, “Green is green.”

Chip Giller is founder and editor of *Grist.org*, an online environmental magazine. David Roberts is a *Grist.org* senior writer.

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