



SustainAbility

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Global water shortage will transform business operations, Industrial practices over next decade, says new SustainAbility GlobeScan survey

Carl Ganter, Circle of Blue, calls TSS water survey results “stunning guidance for anyone working in sustainability.”

- Experts project that the depletion of global water resources is progressing in a manner that is more rapid, severe, and complex than previously anticipated.
- Changes across nearly all sectors of the global economy are expected as a result of water shortages.
- Companies need to be prepared to address increasing pressure for responsible water consumption practices - expect greater regulatory action and stakeholder activism.

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Population growth, urban development, farm production, and climate change are increasing competition for fresh water and producing shortages so acute that virtually every industry in the world anticipates sweeping systemic transformation over the next decade in their strategic planning, production practices, and business models.

That is the conclusion of a new global opinion poll of more than 1,200 sustainability experts conducted by [GlobeScan](#), an international public and stakeholder opinion research firm, and [SustainAbility](#), a think tank and business strategy consultancy. The results are published online today by [Circle of Blue](#), the global network of leading journalists, scientists and communicators focused on global water issues. Carl Ganter, Director of Circle of Blue, calls the TSS water survey results “stunning guidance for anyone working in sustainability.” ([Full coverage here.](#))

Jeff Erikson, senior vice president at SustainAbility, said the decisions executives make to respond to freshwater scarcity will penetrate almost every aspect of their business operations. In China, for instance, executives who consider locating plants north of the Tibetan Plateau are likely to more carefully consider the consequences of rapidly melting Himalayan glaciers that feed some of China’s most important rivers. In the United States, manufacturers may shift new plants from the increasingly dry Southwest back to the water-rich Great Lakes region.

“Over the last 20 years water shortage has not been a lens that has been heavily considered in plant siting,” said Erikson. “That will change.”

The Sustainability Survey Poll on Water was conducted in more than 80 countries. Some 1,200 influential thought leaders from companies, governments, NGOs, and academia said that

multi-faceted engagement with water will be required for companies and governments to effectively manage businesses and communities.

Along with return on investment, capital requirements, and quarterly returns companies that want to stay in business will need to add expertise to their staffs to manage the new market signals in the era of water scarcity. New business practices will stress water conservation and efficiency, ecosystem protection, public education and engagement. Companies also will need to anticipate market pressure to appropriately price water.

“Our panel of experts has been very good at predicting implications for companies in the sustainability agenda,” said Chris Coulter, senior vice president at GlobeScan. “These findings should sound the alarm for companies that haven’t yet established robust water strategies. This is about literally retaining license to operate in many parts of the world.”

The poll’s experts said that companies will need to develop programs in “water footprinting” – understanding the full life-cycle impacts of a company’s operations and products – which they viewed as being as important or more important than carbon footprinting. In addition, corporations are expected to establish water management goals at the corporate level as well as for specific facilities. When asked to identify corporate leaders in sustainable water management, Coca-Cola was cited most frequently followed by Nestlé, GE, SAB Miller, Pepsi, and Unilever.

The new SustainAbility and Globescan survey comes six months after a [Circle of Blue/Globescan survey](#) of 15,000 people in 15 countries found that water scarcity and water pollution are the top environmental concerns in the world. “The conclusions reached by these experts are consistent with what our journalists have reported from the front lines of the global freshwater crisis,” said J. Carl Ganter, the co-founder and director of Circle of Blue, the premier news organization in the world covering fresh water. “Scarcity and pollution are growing worse, and survival for people or companies means responding to it in very new ways.”

The experts polled by SustainAbility and GlobeScan strongly favored measures that reduce demand over those that increase supply. And rather than anticipating that new technology will solve the world’s water crisis, experts said they expected better use of existing technologies coupled with more effective government policies and public education as offering more promise. Experts also cited strong links between water and energy in developing effective public policy.

Full coverage

[Coming Era of Water Scarcity Prompts Global Industrial Transformation](#)

[Q&A with Jeff Erikson, SustainAbility, and Chris Coulter, Globescan](#)

[WaterViews](#)

Circle of Blue/Globescan public opinion survey on attitudes about fresh water sustainability, management and conservation.

About *The Sustainability Survey*

[The Sustainability Survey](#) is a comprehensive program of research, analysis, and solutions that assists corporate leaders in navigating the challenges and opportunities related to sustainability. The online survey on water was conducted between November and December 2009 with 1,243 experts from 80 countries.

About GlobeScan

GlobeScan is an international opinion research consultancy. Companies, multilateral institutions, governments and NGOs trust GlobeScan for its unique expertise in reputation research, sustainability, and issues management. GlobeScan provides global organizations with evidence-based insight and advice to help them build strong brands, manage relations with key stakeholders, and define their strategic positioning. Established in 1987, GlobeScan is an independent, management-owned company with offices in London, Toronto, and San Francisco. www.GlobeScan.com

About SustainAbility

SustainAbility is a strategy consultancy and think tank working with senior corporate decision makers to achieve transformative leadership on the sustainability agenda. SustainAbility also undertakes advocacy and research to contribute to public policies and broader public understanding which drive environmental, social and economic progress. www.sustainability.com

About Circle of Blue

Circle of Blue is the international, nonpartisan network of leading journalists, scientists and communications design experts that reports and presents the information necessary to respond to the global fresh water crisis. It is a nonprofit affiliate of the international water, climate and policy think tank, [the Pacific Institute](#), and publishes [WaterNews](#), the daily go-to source for global water news and data. Follow Circle of Blue feeds on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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