

A Hot Bed for Green Innovation

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It's no secret that both parties in Washington are having some trouble finding common ground these days. In fact, the amount of common ground seems to be disappearing faster than you can say 'economic recovery,' or 'debt ceiling,' or 'mama grizzly,' or whatever the sociopolitical buzz words of the moment are.

But from Obama to Bachmann, everyone appears to agree that the economic downturn isn't going away quietly, and that to grow we need to innovate our way out of this recession.

While the methods of economic stimulus are hotly debated, some companies aren't waiting around for guidance on how to adapt and thrive. One city by the bay is making a name for itself with thriving sustainability start-ups, and surprisingly it is not the one you think.

Oakland, C.A., not always shed in the fairest light, is home to several green tech start-ups that are doing really innovative work. One such company is [Ditto](#), who identified a market need for a greener way to showcase retail merchandise, and well, found a solution.

Some analysis shows that more than [eight billion](#) clothes hangers -- most of which aren't easily recycled -- clog dumpsters every year. That's enough to fill the Empire State Building from basement to top nearly five times.

Ditto is working with companies like The Gap, Adidas and Bed Bath & Beyond to not only utilize more sustainable materials in their hangers, but ensure they are made with universally recyclable materials (paper, PET plastic) -- which sadly is currently not a standard industry practice.

Another Oakland-based company putting a green twist on everyday practices is [Fogbusters Inc.](#), an organization that works with restaurants, municipalities and companies to remove fat, oil and grease from wastewater without chemicals, safely and cleanly.

All companies and homes operate and cook with oil and greases, but Fogbusters has developed technology to capture this oil and actually reuse it, keeping it out of waterways and reducing waste.

[Ecologic Brands](#) is another thriving Oakland company that's completely rethinking how we use packaging materials, and has partnered with companies like Seventh Generation and Straus Family Creamery to deliver goods in 100 percent recycled and recyclable materials, turning potential waste into a resource.

And neighboring [BrightSource Energy](#) designs, develops and sells solar thermal power systems that deliver reliable and cost-competitive clean energy to utilities and industrial companies -- many of which are in Oakland.

Beyond start-ups, major companies like [Clorox](#) and [Cost Plus World Market](#) -- both Oakland-based -- have also adapted operations and products to meet the demand for more sustainable businesses.

And who thought San Francisco and Silicon Valley were the only stars of the innovation movement? I think the bay area just got a little greener.