

New project to make 11 islands waste-free

By ARTHUR MAX, The Associated Press

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THE HAGUE, Netherlands — Eleven North Sea islands have signed up to become living laboratories for a waste-free environment.

The islands from six countries will follow a "cradle-to-cradle" philosophy, which calls for using renewable energy and products made from materials that can be endlessly reused or organically decomposed.

Innovations will include electric vehicles, a desalination system for drinking water that removes salt in a usable form, and purification of household water – including human waste.

"The islands will be a catalyst for innovation for the whole region," German chemist Michael Braungart said at the unveiling of the project late Wednesday. Technical universities from around northern Europe will try out new solutions for small-scale energy production, transportation and water management, with the aim of making the islands nearly self-sustaining by 2030, project managers said. The EU is donating euro3.5 million (\$4.5 million) for the first four-year phase. Islands from Germany, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands and the Britain will take part. The Cradle to Cradle Island project will be overseen by officials of the northern Dutch province of Friesland. The islands have a total of nearly 50,000 residents, but most of them swell with visitors during the summer. Some of the islands see the project as a way of attracting more tourists.

The concept originated in the 1970s, but was popularized with a 2002 book by Braungart and American architect William McDonough, "Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things." It calls for revamping industries to use non-harmful materials that can be reused for other products when their original life span reaches an end. An office chair, for example, can be regenerated in 200 ways, said Braungart, of the Environmental Protection and Encouragement Agency.

"If you don't change the whole industrial sector within the next 10 to 15 years, the system will destroy itself. It's already starting," Braungart told The Associated Press. Among other proposed ideas, new buildings will use paint on the internal walls containing micro-organisms that clean the air, and cement on the external walls that removes particulates from the atmosphere, he said.

Different islands will experiment with various elements of sustainability. Several islands of Britain's Shetlands, a group of 100 islands north of Scotland, will tap the energy from waves off its west coast and tidal streams between the islands. The Dutch islands of Texel and Ameland, largely comprised of dunes and bicycle paths, will get a network of electric motor scooters and recharging posts. A Dutch water research company, Wetsus, will experiment with a system to produce electricity by mixing salt water and fresh water.