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Student gets big wheels turning

Brendan O'Keefe | August 22, 2007

A SOFTWARE program that will impel car manufacturers to think about sustainability at every step of the production process has been awarded in the Australian Museum's Eureka Prizes for science.



Eureka prize winner Nick Palousis, and engineering PhD student. Picture: Bob Finlayson

Engineering PhD student Nick Palousis, from the University of South Australia, was last night named winner of the Eureka Prize for young leaders in environmental issues and climate change.

The \$10,000 prize is sponsored by the British Council.

Mr Palousis's software program, which is his PhD thesis, engages engineers at the design level, addressing how the product will be made, what materials will be used, what effect the car will have on the environment and how it will be disposed of. One European car-maker already has expressed an interest in the program.

Mr Palousis is an associate of an Australian company, Sustainable Business Practices.

The 2006 young South Australian of the year said his program would be applicable to many manufacturing industries. He said the program was about manufacturers responding to business risk rather than relating to environmental regulations. Either way, the result was a more sustainable product.

"I'm using my research to help develop a risk-assessment and management tool so designers in manufacturing companies can make decisions (that) comply with the regulations but reduce business risk generally," Mr Palousis said.

"Rather than respond to environmental regulations, they are responding to business risk.

"Engineers need to think about making products like vehicles in a whole new light.

"Energy efficiency, CO2 emissions, environmental impact and disposal issues such as toxicity and landfill are all on the agenda. These are now strategic considerations to minimise business risk."

Mr Palousis was among 17 winners. University of Queensland Technology and Innovation Management Centre manager Mark Dodgson won the Clunies Ross prize for his work in encouraging businesses and government to innovate and take risks.

James Cook University's Terry Hughes was awarded the environmental research prize for his life's work on studying and protecting the Great Barrier Reef.

He is the leader of the Australian Research Council's Centre for Excellence for Coral Reef Studies, a key provider of the science that underpins the management of the Great Barrier Reef, other Australian reefs and coral reefs worldwide.

Hala Raghieb of RMIT University's school of medical sciences won the people's choice award for her screening model of a method of testing heart drugs without harming animals. Dr Raghieb was a nominee in the Voiceless Eureka prize, which replaces the use of animals or animal products in research.

For a full list of winners, visit: www.austmus.gov.au/eureka