

Smarter Sorting scores \$17M to reduce chemical waste

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CEO Chris Ripley and Charlie Vallely, Smarter Sorting's co-founders, in a 2017 file photo.

Arnold Wells/Staff



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From trash islands in the ocean to the plastic bag-strewn banks of almost any river in the world, we can see for ourselves the impact of our commerce. Meanwhile, retailers and manufacturers have to figure out how to dispose of — or hopefully, recycle — unused, expired and returned products.

Some new innovations are providing glimpses of how we might get better at managing this mass consumption and waste cycle.

Smarter Sorting, an Austin startup that this week raised \$17 million in Series A funding, is approaching the problem by showing retailers what exactly is in the consumer products on their shelves. It culls granular, chemical-level data for a broad list of products. Then it suggests the best ways to reuse, recycle or dispose of the product by taking those chemical profiles and using machine learning to code the attributes in and compare it with local regulations and known impacts on the environment.

“By understanding items down to their chemical level and building software designed to optimize and simplify the use of advanced data, we enable retailers and other stakeholders to sustainably and accountably handle products,” Smarter Sorting CEO [Chris Ripley](#) said in a news release. “By doing so, we are creating a brand new era of responsible commerce.”

The startup’s new funding was led by [US Ecology](#) Inc. (Nasdaq: ECOL), a regulated waste treatment and disposal company. Also in the round was [RTP Ventures](#) and other investors the company identified only as industry experts. That new cash will help it work on ways to become a top solution for consumer product regulatory classification, and for hiring.

The company expects to grow its headcount from 38 people to 52 in the next six months and is considering looking for new office space to handle that growth. Executives also want to adapt its platform to handle not only retail and regulated waste management but to fully take on the chemical supply chain, including transportation and e-commerce.