



Glossary of Terms

Aquifer – water bearing layer found beneath the Earth’s surface.

Age of Sustainability – In the Age of Sustainability our civilization is discovering that in order to survive on this planet, healthy and indefinitely, we must create ways of living that give and take equally.

Bio-based Product – A product (other than food or feed) that is produced from renewable agricultural (plant, animal, and marine) or forestry materials.

Biodegradable – Capable of decomposing in nature within a reasonably short period of time.

Biodiversity – The sum total of different organisms within an ecosystem.

Biomass – Wood-based materials, agricultural crops, landfill gas, animal and other organic waste. When used as an energy source, biomass is considered to be a source of renewable energy.

Biomimicry – The study of nature and imitation of nature’s forms. The process of learning from and then emulating life’s genius.

Catch Basin – Any place or drain that receives run off from natural or man-made surfaces.

Chemical Pollution – The introduction of toxic substances into an ecosystem, e.g., acid rain, contamination of water supplies by pesticides.

Coastal Upwelling – An ocean process that occurs most notably on the western coasts of continents when cold nutrient-rich bottom water flows to the surface along the continental coastlines.

“Cradle-to-cradle” – A term used to describe a material or product that is recycled into a new or similar product at the end of its intended life.

“Cradle-to-grave” – A term used to describe a material or product that is disposed (landfill, incineration, etc.) of at the end of its intended life.

Ecological Footprint – The resulting impacts on the environment based on the choices we make (i.e. raw materials selection, energy selection, transportation, etc.).

Ecosystem – The interaction of organisms from the natural community with one another and their environment to sustain one another.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – An independent executive agency of the federal government, established in 1970, responsible for the formulation and enforcement of regulations governing the release of pollutants, to protect public health and the environment.

Flood Control Channel – Open waterway that is designed to carry large amounts of rain water. These structures are often lined with concrete to help control flood waters.

Thermal Pollution - Varying temperatures above or below the normal condition, e.g., power plant turbine heated water.

Organic Pollution - Oversupplying an ecosystem with nutrients, e.g., fertilizer inflow.

Ecological Pollution - Stresses ordinarily created by natural processes, like extreme tides that pour saltwater into habitats ordinarily protected from sea water, and abnormal increase in sediments in runoff water producing silt. Also, altering the level or concentration of biological or physical components of an ecosystem, like invasive species that inhabit a new ecosystem.

Groundwater – Water that is stored in open spaces underground and within sediment.

Hydrology – The scientific study of the properties, distribution and effects of water in the atmosphere, on the Earth's surface and in soil and rocks.

Invasive Species – Non-native plants and animal species that have been introduced to an area where they do not occur naturally.

Life Cycle Assessment – A compilation and evaluation of the inputs, outputs, and the potential environmental impacts of a product or system throughout its life cycle.

Marine Debris – Any trash, natural or man-made, that is found in the marine environment.

Native Species – Plants and animal species that have evolved in a specific area over a period of time; naturally occurring species; indigenous.

Nonpoint Source Pollution - Nonpoint source pollution is contaminated runoff originating from an indefinite or undefined place, often a variety of places (e.g., farms, city streets and parking lots, yards and landscaping, construction sites, and logging operations).

Nonrenewable energy – Sources of energy that cannot be replaced in a reasonable period of time. Fossil fuels (coal, petroleum, natural gas) are examples of nonrenewable energy sources.

Outfall – Opening at the end of a storm drain system that allows water to flow into a channel, lake, river, bay or ocean.

Phytoplankton – Microscopic marine algae that are the primary producers in the marine food web.

Plankton – A general term for the entire community of microscopic free-floating organisms, including phytoplankton, zooplankton, and a host of other marine organisms. Plankton serves as the primary food source for most marine ecosystems. Many animals feed entirely on planktonic organisms and are important stops in the food chain.

Point source pollution – Point source pollution originates from a specific place such as an oil refinery or a paper mill.

Pollutants – Any substance, biological or chemical, in which identified excess is known to be harmful to desirable organisms (both plants and animals). Some pollutants are toxic or poisonous. Others are dangerous because they stick to feathers (oil and tar) making it impossible for birds to fly or find food, or clog throats and stomachs, and entangle necks (plastic bags and plastic 6-pack rings) of marine creatures.

Pollution – A human or naturally caused change in physical, chemical, or biological conditions that results in an undesirable effect on the environment; contamination of air, soil, or water by the discharge of harmful substances.

Precipitation – The fall of condensed moisture as rain, snow, hail or sleet.

Recycling – The series of activities, including collection, separation, and processing, by which materials are recovered from the waste stream for use as raw materials in the manufacture of new products.

Recyclable – A designation for products or materials that are capable of being recovered from, or otherwise diverted from waste streams for recycling.

Closed-loop Recycling – The process of recycling in such a way that the components of the original product are reclaimed or utilized into similar products without the process of downcycling.

Downcycling – The process of recycling in such a way that new products are of lesser economic value. An example would be turning nylon face fiber into park benches.

Upcycling – The process of recycling in such a way that new products are of higher economic value. Example: using waste PET (plastic from soda bottles) to create Terratex® panel fabric.

Recycled Content – Refers to the percentage of the total weight of recycled materials in a product.

Post-consumer Recycled Content – Material that has been recovered after its intended use as a consumer product. Examples include reclaimed carpet tiles (for new tile backing).

Post-industrial Recycled Content – Material that has been recovered from the manufacturing waste stream before it has served its intended purpose. Example: Nylon 6,6 extrusion waste.

Renewable Energy – Energy derived from sources, which are regenerative or recurring. Examples include wind energy, hydro-, geothermal, or wave action.

Renewable Resources – A resource that can be replenished at a rate equal to, or greater than its rate of depletion. Examples include corn (for PLA products), trees, soy-based products, etc.

Runoff – Water that flows over land surfaces and does not percolate, or sink, into the ground.

Storm Water – Runoff in the storm drain system.

Sustainability – “Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable – to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (World Commission on Environment and Development, Brundtland Commission, “Our Common Future”) “Leave the world better than you found it, take no more than you need, try not to harm life or the environment, make amends if you do.” (Paul Hawken, *The Ecology of Commerce*, 1993, p. 139).

Wastewater – Water that comes from showers, toilets and kitchen basins, that contain high levels of bacteria that requires processing at sewage treatment facilities before being returned to the natural environment or used for irrigation.

Water Table – The level below the ground where ground water is closest to the surface.

Watershed - An area that is drained by rivers and streams and includes geographical structures like mountains, valleys, and man-made structures like buildings, parking lots and highways, but it also includes a rich biodiversity that is supported by the ecosystems within.

Zooplankton – Small, free-floating marine organisms that live in the world’s oceans and drift with the currents. These small creatures usually feed on phytoplankton.