

A Glossary of Eco-Terms

What does it mean to be green?

Abaca

A species of banana plant. Its leaves and stems are harvested for its fiber. Used in clothing and other textile goods. Sustainable alternative to cotton.

Air Pollution

Airborne contaminants that adversely affect the environment or human health. Often a by-product of the manufacturing process and transportation of goods.

Bamboo

An alternative to wood. More renewable than wood because it is a fast-growing grass/reed. Look for certified organic bamboo label.

Biodegradable

Materials that decompose when naturally occurring organisms, like bacteria and earthworms, feed on them.

Biodiesel Fuel

A clean-burning, non-toxic alternative fuel made from animal fats and plant oils. It goes through a refinery process called transesterification, which makes the oil suitable for car engines.

Carbon Footprint

Total amount of carbon dioxide emitted through the use of fossil fuels such as coal and oil, and manufactured products.

CFL's

Compact fluorescent light bulbs. They are more energy efficient than standard light bulbs. They actually use only a fraction of the electricity used by incandescent bulbs.

Carbon-Neutral Design

A design process that doesn't produce greenhouse gases or contribute to global warming during any part of its life cycle, from production through consumption and disposal.

Carbon Offsetting

A way to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) released into the atmosphere by balancing or canceling out the amount of these gases through investments made in environmentally friendly projects.

Certified Wood

Under the guidance of the FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) wood-based materials used in building construction that are supplied from sources that comply with sustainable forestry practices, protecting trees, wildlife habitat, streams, and soil.

Construction Waste Management Plan (CWMP)

A plan that diverts construction debris from landfills through conscientious plans to recycle, salvage and reuse.

Cork

Used in flooring and other applications. Cork is harvested by peeling away the bark from the trunk and branches every 9-12 years, and does not necessitate the felling of the tree. Cork Oak trees do not die when the bark is removed.

DIY

Do-it-yourself. Creating things yourself without the help of professionals. A mentality that often goes hand-in-hand with recycling and conserving resources.

Durability

How well a product stands up after a sustained period of use.

Eco-Chic

A product that is both eco-friendly and hip.

Eco-Friendly

Products made with ecology and the environment in mind.

Emissions

Particles and gases released into the air as byproducts, usually of the manufacturing process.

Energy Efficient

Products and systems that use less energy to perform as well or better than standard products. While energy-efficient products sometimes have higher up-front costs, they tend to cost less over their lifetime when the cost of energy is factored in. An example of this is fluorescent light bulbs vs. incandescent bulbs.

Flat-Pack

Refers to goods that are designed to pack flat, thereby reducing shipping costs and fuel used in transportation.

Formaldehyde

A volatile organic compound used in many applications, such as particle-board, glue, and permanent press fabrics.

Geothermal

Pertaining to heat energy extracted from reservoirs in the earth's interior.

Green Building

A building designed to conserve resources and negative impacts on the environment, whether it is energy, water, building materials or land.

Green Design

A term used to indicate design sensitive to environmentally-friendly, ecological issues.

Greenhouse Gases

Gases such as carbon dioxide that trap heat in the earth's atmosphere, contributing to global warming.

Greenwashing

A superficial nod to the environment that marketers and businesses use to improve their public relations standings with the consumer or public.

Going Green

A phrase referring to individual action that a person can consciously take to curb harmful effects on the environment through consumer habits, behavior, and lifestyle.

Hybrid

An automobile that runs on both electric battery and gasoline fuel, making the gas mileage extremely efficient, and also produces fewer emissions which help control pollution in the environment.

IAQ (Indoor Air Quality)

A measurement of the cleanliness of indoor air based on the amount of particles, dust, mold, gases, and pollutants present.

Ingeo

The first commercially viable man-made fiber which comes from corn. It is the first natural-based synthetic fiber to meet the performance requirements of traditional petroleum-based fibers.

Kapok

A tree which produces a fluffy fiber in their seed pods. The kapok fiber is a substitute for down.

Low Flow

Installing plumbing fixtures including faucets, toilets and showerheads with lower flow is a simple strategy for cutting down water use considerably.

Low-VOC

A term referring to reduced amounts of volatile organic compounds.

Natural

A product that is made from materials and ingredients found in nature with little or no human intervention.

Non-Toxic

Any substance that is neither poisonous nor toxic to the environment or its inhabitants.

Organic

An alternative farming method for crops, dairy foods and livestock which removes toxins, manufactured chemicals, synthetic additives, genetically modified organisms and provides products which are biodegradable.

PBDE

Polybrominated diphenyl ethers. An industrial toxic chemical used as a flame retardant. By the year 2011, this is to be completely banned from most products.

Post-Consumer

Refers to recycled material that was used first by a consumer. High post-consumer content helps divert materials from ending up in landfills.

Pre-consumer

Refers to recycled material that came from the manufacturing process. Pre-consumer recycling of scraps and discards divert waste that may otherwise end up in landfills. Also reduces the use of raw materials.

PVC

Polyvinyl chloride, emits the toxin dioxin when produced. It is commonly found in toys, shower curtains, window blinds, artificial leather, vinyl furniture covers.

Rapidly Renewable

Materials such as bamboo and cork that replenish faster than hardwoods.

Recyclable

A product or material that can be converted back into material that can be used again in manufacturing new goods.

Recycled

Materials used again or reprocessed.

Renewable Energy

Energy harvested from sources that are not depleted when used, typically causing very low environmental impact. Some examples are solar energy, hydroelectric power and wind power.

Renewable

A raw material that can be replenished within a reasonable amount of time. For example, bamboo is renewable and precious stones are not.

Soy Fiber

A product made from tofu manufacturing waste. It is incredibly soft and feels similar to cashmere.

Sustainable

Actions and products that meet current needs without sacrificing the ability of future generations to meet theirs. Sustainability is a broad term and often refers to the desire to provide the best outcomes for the human and natural environments both now and into the indefinite future.

Sustainably-Harvested

A renewable resource that has been harvested in a way that allows its inherent regeneration and continued ongoing supply.

VOC

Volatile organic compounds. Toxic chemical compounds that have high enough vapor pressure under normal conditions to vaporize and enter the atmosphere – a process called “offgassing.” Common VOC’s are formaldehyde, acetone, benzene, and gasoline. Found in many common products such as paint, paint thinners, carpeting, furniture and household cleaning products.

Waste Reduction

A process to reduce or eliminate that amount of waste generated at its source or to reduce the amount of toxicity from waste or from the reuse of materials. The creation of waste is a growing problem on the environment, as landfills get filled and toxins leach back into the ground.

Wastewater

Water that has been used and contaminated. Wastewater must be purified before being used again or before being returned to the environment.

Zero-VOC

A term used to indicate paint containing no volatile organic compounds. A healthier alternative to conventional paints.