

Glossary of Terms

As awareness of environmental issues and their potential impacts grows each day, so does the new and sometimes complex information that we need to understand. Everyday it seems we are faced with understanding new terminology regarding the environment and sustainability. To help in understanding this terminology, we have created a list of some of the most common sustainable terms.

The goal is to reduce these issues to their most basic descriptions. Where applicable, we have attached website address for those who wish to do more research.

- **Acid Rain**
Rain with increased acidity due to absorption of airborne pollutants such as CO₂ and sulphur dioxide which have increased due primarily to industrialization.
- **Biodegradable**
Any material that can be broken down by living things including micro-organisms such as bacteria.
- **Biodiversity**
The variety of different species within a set habitat. For example, the biodiversity of the Amazon Rainforest is greater than that of the Gobi desert.

http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/habitat/fish_protection_act/riparian/riparian_areas.html

Glossary of Terms

- **Biofuels**
A fuel that is made from (in whole or in part) renewable organic sources, such as rapeseed oil. These can include refined fuels such as ethanol and biodiesel as well as unrefined such as wood.
- **Carbon capture**
New technology can now capture large amounts of carbon emissions and store them in isolated areas. This means they don't float into our atmosphere and speed up climate change. The technology is relatively new and has not been implemented on a large scale basis
- **Carbon dioxide**
Carbon dioxide is a gas that's made when fossil fuels are burnt to provide power for everything from driving your car to boiling the kettle. It's also made when organic things like when trees are burnt. It's then released into the earth's atmosphere and is one of the harmful gases, when produced in large amounts, known as Greenhouse Gases.
- **Carbon footprint**
We all have a carbon footprint; it's the amount of CO₂ each of us produces in our daily lives (for example, aside from breathing, through using electricity in our homes or driving), and the impact that has on the environment. Other gases like methane (produced by cows!) also contribute to a carbon footprint.
- **Carbon negative**
Any process or product that removes carbon from the atmosphere. Growing trees is the best example of being carbon negative.

Glossary of Terms

- **Carbon neutral**
A process that produces no greenhouse gases is referred to as carbon neutral. A business can reach carbon neutrality through a combination of reducing emissions and the purchase of carbon offsets or credits
- **Carbon offset**
Carbon offsetting is a way of balancing your carbon emissions. There are a number of ways of doing this including funding schemes to plant trees or replace energy production from fossil fuels with renewable energy such as wind or solar power. It can help to reduce your carbon footprint but is best viewed as a last resort once actual energy use has been reduced as much as possible.
- **Carbon tax**
This is the tax on the use of fossil fuels like oil. It's based on the amount of carbon each fuel gives out when it's used.
- **Carbon trading**
Carbon trading is a way of reducing carbon emissions. Many companies are now part of a carbon trading scheme where the government gives each company a set amount of carbon credits each year. If a company doesn't use all of their credits, they can sell them to other companies who have used all of theirs. Again, reduction of carbon emissions is still the preferred first step.

Glossary of Terms

- **Climate change**
The climate has always been in a state of change. Climate change can be due to natural causes, but most scientists agree that the rises in the earth's temperature are linked to the way we live and activities like burning fossil fuels. This means that the temperature of the earth is getting hotter, causing ice caps to melt and sea levels to rise. According to the World Wildlife Fund, climate change could cause a global, humanitarian and environmental disaster.
- **Cradle to cradle**
This is a construction and production principal that aims to make all components of a manufactured object reusable or disposable with no negative ecological effects.
- **Deforestation**
Deforestation is simply the process of removing trees from land. Trees help absorb CO₂, one of the main gases that contribute to climate change, so the more trees that get chopped down, the less carbon is absorbed. Estimates show that deforestation contributes to nearly 20% of global carbon emissions
- **Dioxins**
A group of chemicals, some of which are highly toxic, which can be formed by incomplete combustion (such as you may find in incinerators) and are believed to contribute to pollution and climate change.
- **Eco friendly**
An object or action that is believed to be less harmful to the environment than a common alternative. For example, walking to work is more eco friendly than driving.

Glossary of Terms

- **Ecological footprint**
The Ecological Footprint measures how our lifestyles affect other people as well as the planet. It works out how much land and sea is needed to feed everyone and to provide all the energy, water and raw materials like wood we use in our everyday lives.
- **Ecosystem**
A system made up of a community of living organisms. You might talk about the ecosystem of British Columbia or Canada as a whole.
- **Energy efficient**
Energy efficient products use less energy, but work just as well, if not better, than standard products. Energy efficient light bulbs use up to 80% less energy and last much longer than standard light bulbs. Find out more. There are lots of other energy efficient products available from fridges to computers. Look for the Canada EnerGuide label when shopping for appliances and make sure to check out BC Hydro's website. <http://www.bchydro.com/>
- **Fair-trade Mark**
The Fair-trade Mark is an independent consumer label which appears on products as a guarantee that they have given their producers a better deal. Farmers supplying Fair-trade products receive a minimum price that covers the cost of sustainable production and an extra premium that is invested in social or economic development projects.

Glossary of Terms

- **Food miles**
This is the distance food travels from where it is grown to where it is consumed. This can be used to measure the impact each product has on the environment. However, to get the whole picture it's also important to look at how the food travelled and how it was produced in the first place. Fruit and vegetables from your own garden have no food miles at all!
- **Fossil fuels**
Oil, natural gas and coal are all fossil fuels. They are formed in the ground from the remains of dead plants and animals over millions of years.
- **FSC wood**
The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) helps to make sure that wood products come from sustainable forests. When you see the FSC label, you can be sure the wood product you are buying has come from a forest that is responsibly managed, with respect for wildlife and the people who live there.
- **Global warming**
The temperature of the Earth's surface and atmosphere is gradually warming. However recently the rate at which this is happening has rapidly increased. Most Scientists now agree that this is caused by greenhouse gasses being released into the atmosphere by the burning of fossil fuels and other industrial processes.
- **Greenhouse effect**
The increase in greenhouse gasses means that more of the sun's heat is trapped in our atmosphere. This is called the greenhouse effect. It alters the delicate balance of our climate and the result is global warming.

Glossary of Terms

- **Greenhouse gas**
There are two main types of greenhouse gases: natural ones like methane and those made by humans burning fossil fuels. They trap and absorb the sun's heat. The more greenhouse gas we produce, the more we contribute to the Greenhouse Effect.
- **Green washing** – the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service
- **Grey water**
Water from showers, baths and washing machines that makes up 50% to 80% of domestic wastewater, which, if proper recovery systems are in place, can sometimes be used to water the garden and for car washing.
- **Hybrid car**
Hybrid Cars are a new generation of cars which use electricity as well as fuel for power. This means they emit less CO₂ and are friendlier to our environment.
- **Hydroelectric**
Hydroelectric power is electricity generated by running water. It's a great way of using a natural force to create electricity.
- **Kyoto Protocol**
This is an agreement reached in 1997 by most industrial nations around the world, including Canada to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

Glossary of Terms

- **Landfill**
Disposal of garbage by burying it under the ground. Despite increased awareness of the issue, the expansion of recycling and the placing of bans on certain products, British Columbians send millions of tonnes of waste to landfills each year. The issue is becoming more critical in the lower mainland as several landfills are close to capacity and alternative sites have not yet been established.
- **LEED Building Standards**
- Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) are building standards for the design, construction and operation of high performance green buildings.
- **Local and seasonal food**
This is food that's produced close to you and grown in season rather than imported from abroad out of season. It doesn't include food produced by artificial means like strawberries grown in winter greenhouses.
- **Methane**
Methane is the second most important gas contributing to the human-made greenhouse effect after carbon dioxide. Around 40% of methane in North America comes from landfill sites, and around 37% from agriculture, including livestock. .
- **Non-renewable resource**
Any resources that cannot be re-made or re-grown at the rate they are consumed. Examples include coal and oil.

Glossary of Terms

- **Organic Food**
Organic food is produced using organic farming methods. While standards differ in every region, the basic fundamentals of organic standards restrict the use of artificial fertilizers and pesticides and avoids the genetic modification of food (organism that have had their DNA altered through genetic engineering).
- **Ozone**
This toxic form of oxygen can cause real problems for us at surface level, but protects us from the sun's ultraviolet rays in the upper atmosphere – the ozone layer.
- **Polar melt**
The continuing melting of polar ice at a faster rate than its seasonal growth, causing an ongoing shrinking of the ice caps.
- **Recyclable**
The ability of a product or material to be recovered or otherwise diverted from the solid waste stream for the purpose of recycling
- **Renewable energy**
Wave, wind and solar power are all renewable energies: they produce electricity without harming our environment.
- **Sustainable development**
If everyone in the world lived the same way as we currently do in British Columbia, we'd need three planets to support us, according to the World Wildlife Fund. Sustainable development is about using all of our natural resources more responsibly, so we can meet our needs today without affecting the ability of future generations to meet their needs too.

Glossary of Terms

- **Waste to Energy**
Is the process of creating energy in the form of [electricity](#) or [heat](#) from the incineration of [waste source](#). Most WtE processes produce electricity directly through combustion, or produce a combustible fuel commodity, such as [methane](#), [methanol](#), [ethanol](#) or synthetic fuels.
- **Wind turbines**
A modern day windmill which uses the power of the wind to produce electricity.