

Glossary of Environmental Terms

Aquifer: An underground layer of porous or fractured rock filled with water; source of water to a well or spring.

Compost: A dark brown organic material created from decayed grass, leaves, and other yard waste. As a soil amendment, compost can help plants and other things grow while reducing water needs.

Conservation: The wise use of natural resources.

Contamination: Situations where an unwanted material is mixed with collected materials; for example, putting left-over pizza in with newspapers. Contamination is expensive to cleanup. Prevent it whenever possible.

Durable: When something does not easily break or wear out during normal use, it is tough and durable. An example would be metal silverware instead of plastic.

Disposable: Things usually meant to be used only once and then thrown away. They are often not recyclable, such as styrofoam cups.

Energy Efficient: Anything that has been designed, built and operated to use energy wisely. A well-insulated house is an example.

Environmentally Friendly: A name given to products whose negative impact on the earth is small. They are often reusable or recyclable and/or contain recycled content.

Groundwater: The supply of fresh water found underground, in cracks and crevices, and in the spaces between sand and gravel. Usually found in aquifers, which supply wells and springs.

Hauler: A garbage or recyclables collection company or truck.

Household Hazardous Waste: Products purchased for use at home which can harm the environment. Generally products which have the words "Caution", "Danger", or "Warning" on the label.

Landfill: A specially designed site for the disposal of solid waste on land.

Leachate: A liquid formed when water seeps through a landfill picking up contaminants. Contamination occurs if leachate leaks into surface or groundwater.

Materials Recovery Facility: A place where recyclables are brought for initial processing. The materials are checked for contaminations, sorted and packaged. People, machinery, and equipment work together to accomplish the work.

Mixed Paper: A collection of different types of previously used recyclable paper, including colored paper, manila folders, brown paper bags, etc.

Glossary of Environmental Terms

Non-Point Pollution: Pollution from a broad area, such as from pesticide use or motor oil on a roadway, or phosphate soaps used for car washing, rather than from one specific source.

Non-Toxic: Not poisonous or harmful to living things or the environment.

Organic Material: Something made from living matter, such as plant material. Organic things can decompose.

Packaging: The covering or container of a product. Packaging keeps things safe and sanitary, but it is best to have as little packaging as needed, with packaging that uses recycled materials and is itself recyclable.

Point Pollution: Pollution originating from a specific source, such as the outfall from a ditch, (for example, from a factory), pipe, tunnel or well.

Pollution Prevention: The reduction of the amount or toxicity of hazardous substances released into the waste stream or environment.

Post-consumer: This literally means “after (post) being used by someone (consumer)”. When a product lists its percentage of “post-consumer waste”, that amount of the product is made from materials which were bought and used by a consumer, then recycled. Look for products with high percentages of post-consumer waste.

Precipitation: Water that falls as rain, sleet, hail or snow.

Precycle: Buying items with minimal packaging, items easy to recycle, or items made from recycled materials. “Buying with waste reduction in mind.”

Recyclable: An item is considered recyclable if, after its original use, it can be remanufactured into another product.

Recycled Content: This refers to the amount of recycled materials in a product. It can include either pre- or post-consumer content.

Recycling: The act of placing items in a recycling collection system, so they can be remanufactured, rather than in waste disposal for a landfill.

Re-refined Oil: Previously used motor oil that has been processed into clean oil.

Reusable: Something that can be used again and again.

Sanitary Landfill: A place where garbage is buried. The bottoms of landfills are lined to prevent leachate from going into the groundwater. The garbage is covered everyday to prevent odors and discourage pests.

Glossary of Environmental Terms

Smart Shopper: Someone who shops with waste reduction and recycling in mind.

Solid Waste: We also call this garbage. It is all the material people throw away that can't be recycled or reused. Unfortunately, some people still throw things in with the garbage that can be recycled or reused.

Sorting: This means separating recyclables into compatible or like groups and preparing them for storage and shipping.

Source Separation: The sorting of recyclable items where they are generated into line, uncontaminated parts. An example would be separating colored paper from white paper in the classroom.

Storm Drain: Drain that collects waste water from homes, schools, businesses. Usually drains to the nearest body of water, which may be a creek, river, stream or Puget Sound.

Surface Water: Water that is on the earth's surface, such as rivers, streams or lakes.

Used Oil: Motor oil that is contaminated and dirty from use. It can be left at an oil collection point. The oil can be re-refined or used as bunker fuel in a ship.

Waste Reduction: This means not producing waste in the first place. When you choose a product with no packaging instead of a similar product with lots of packaging, you are practicing waste reduction.

Water Cycle: The movement of water from the sky to the earth and back to the sky again.

Watershed: An area of land where all the rain and snow and streams flow and empty into the same body of water.

Water Treatment: Waste water from homes and businesses is cleaned at a water treatment facility and returned to a water source.

Yard Waste: Organic debris generated by maintenance of yards, gardens, parks, landscaped areas, and other sources. This material is mostly grass, leaves, needles, prunings, weeds, and chipped woody waste.