

Green Glossary

Still not quite sure what to make of all this “clean technology” and “going green” hysteria? Don’t worry! A lot of what makes the whole green movement hard to follow is simply the dozens of new phrases, terms, and expressions that go along with it. The following is a list of “green” vocabulary words. Get acquainted with the lingo and you’ll realize it’s not as confusing as you may have thought.

Environmental terms explained¹

SOURCE: Adam @ www.lifegoggles.com

A

Air pollution – contaminants or substances in the air that interfere with human health or produce other harmful environmental effects. Read our “[What is Air Pollution?](#)” article for further information.

Alternative energy – usually environmentally friendly, this is energy from uncommon sources such as wind power or [solar energy](#), not fossil fuels.

Alternative fuels – similar to above. Not petrol or diesel but different transportation fuels like natural gas, [methanol](#), bio fuels and electricity.

B

Biodegradable – something when left alone break down and be absorbed into the eco-system. See our [What Does Biodegradable Mean?](#) article.

[Blackwater](#) – the wastewater generated by toilets.

C

Carbon dioxide – CO₂ is a naturally occurring greenhouse gas in the atmosphere. However the amount of it increases when we burn fossil fuels, leading to [global warming](#).

[Carbon footprint](#) – a measure of the your impact on the environment in terms of the amount of [greenhouse gases](#) produced, measured in units of carbon dioxide. Here are [10 easy ways to reduce your carbon footprint](#).

Carbon monoxide – a colourless, odourless and highly toxic gas commonly created during combustion.

[Carbon neutral](#) – a company, person or action either not producing any carbon emissions or if it does have been offset elsewhere.

Carbon offsetting – see offsetting.

Carbon rationing – limiting the amount of carbon you use each year. Carbon rationing action groups (crags) help you reduce your carbon footprint. Find out more [here](#).

Carbon sink – carbon dioxide is naturally absorbed by things such as oceans, forests and peat bogs. These are called carbon sinks.

Carbon tax – a charge on fossil fuels based on their carbon content. Find out more at the [Carbon Tax Center](#).

Chlorofluorocarbons – CFCs are man-made chemical compounds containing carbon, chlorine, fluorine and sometimes hydrogen. Often used in older fridges and air conditions, the chlorine in CFCs damage the ozone layer.

Climate change – a change in temperature and weather patterns due to human activity like burning fossil fuels.

Composting – a process whereby organic wastes, including food and paper, decompose naturally, resulting in a produce rich in minerals and ideal for gardening and farming as a soil conditioner, [mulch](#), resurfacing material, or landfill cover.

Conservation – preserving and renewing, when possible, human and natural resources.

E

Eco-assessment – an evaluation of your home or workplace with the aim of cutting your energy and water usage. See [how to get an eco-assessment of your home](#).

Eco-bag – a ethically, organically made bag to use instead of plastic carrier bags. Like this [one](#).

Eco-bus – a bus which uses a combination of diesel and [electric power](#).

Ecube – a wax cube which mimics food in a fridge to save it energy. More info [on ecubes here](#).

Emissions cap – a limit placed on companies regarding the amount of greenhouse gases it can emit.

Environmentally preferable – products or services that have a lesser or reduced effect on the environment.

Energy efficiency – ways and technology that can reduce the amount of electricity or fuel used to do the same work. Such as keeping a house warm using less energy.

Energy saving grant – money awarded to you to help improve the efficiency of your home and use less energy. See [how you could get an energy saving grant](#).

Energy saving lightbulbs – lightbulbs which use far less energy than conventional [bulbs](#).

F

Fossil fuel – coal, oil and natural gas. A fuel that's been made by the decomposition of fossilised plants and animals.

Fuel cell – a technology that uses an electrochemical process to convert energy into electrical power. Often powered by natural gas, fuel cell power is cleaner than grid-connected power sources. In addition, hot water is produced as a by-product.

G

Geothermal energy – heat that comes from the earth.

Glass recycling – Glass bottles and jars can be recycled endlessly. That means that unlike some other recycled products, a recycled bottle can be recycled into another glass bottle. And another, and so on forever. Find out more [about the endless cycle of glass](#).

Global warming – an increase in the average temperature of the earth, attributed to the burning of fossil fuels.

Graywater – see Greywater.

Green design – a design, usually architectural, conforming to environmentally sound principles of building, material and energy use. A green building, for example, might make use of solar panels, skylights, and recycled building materials.

Green fatigue – becoming tired with some of the constant messages of corporate green credentials and tales of impending global doom. easily overcome, see our [green fatigue article](#).

Green Technology Initiative – a consortium of companies pioneering green computing with the aim of helping to educate and inspire British businesses to become more energy efficient and environmentally responsible with their IT infrastructure. Read more about [the Green Technology Initiative](#).

Green wedding – holding your wedding with the least environmental impact possible. See our [ethical weddings](#) article.

Greenhouse effect – explains global warming. It's the process that raises the temperature of air in the lower atmosphere due to heat trapped by greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, chlorofluorocarbons, and ozone.

Greywater – waste water that does not contain sewage or fecal contamination (such as from the shower) and can be reused for irrigation after filtration. Read more about [greywater here](#).

H

Hydroelectric energy – electric energy produced by moving water.

Hydrofluorocarbons – used as solvents and cleaners in the semiconductor industry, among others; experts say that they possess global warming potentials that are thousands of times greater than CO₂.

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I

IPCC – the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is a UN-commissioned international working group formed in 1988. It assesses climate change and its human causes.

J

K

Kilowatt-hours (kWh) – used to measure electricity and natural gas usage.

L

Landfill – area where waste is dumped and eventually covered with dirt and topsoil.

Life cycle assessment – methodology developed to assess a product's full environmental costs, from raw material to final disposal.

Lead – harmful to the environment used in a lot of paints. It's also toxic to humans.

Light pollution – environmental pollution consisting of the excess of harmful or annoying light.

Low-emission vehicles – cars etc which emit little pollution compared to conventional engines. More [eco car news here](#).

M

N

Non-renewable resources – Resources that are in limited supply, such as oil, coal, and natural gas. Also see [renewable resources](#).

O

Offsetting – the process of reducing carbon emissions by 'offsetting' it. An example is by taking a flight and in compensation paying a company to plant trees to equal the carbon use out. For [example](#).

Oil – fossil fuel used to produce petrol etc and other materials such as plastics.

Organic – while it technically refers to molecules made up of two or more atoms of carbon, it's generally now used as a term for the growth of vegetables etc without the use of artificial pesticides and fertiliser.

Ozone layer – in the upper atmosphere about 15 miles above sea level it forms a protective layer which shields the earth from excessive ultraviolet radiation and occurs naturally.

P

Perceived obsolescence – The art of making products that go out of fashion or “date”, so you buy more slightly different ones, for example the fashion industry. Also see Planned obsolescence.

Photovoltaic panels – solar panels that convert sunlight into electricity. Power is produced when sunlight strikes the semiconductor material and creates an electrical current.

Planned obsolescence – The art of making a product break/fail after a certain amount of time. Not so soon that you will blame the manufacturer, but soon enough for you to buy another one and make more profit for them. Also see Perceived obsolescence.

Plastic – man-made durable and flexible synthetic-based product. Composed mainly of petroleum.

Plastic bags – not very good for the environment. Read some [tips on what to do with plastic bags](#).

Plastic recycling – there are seven different categories of plastics that can be recycled. See [our plastic types chart here](#).

Post consumer waste – waste collected after the consumer has used and disposed of it.

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R

Recycle symbol – the chasing arrow symbol used to show that a product or package can be recycled. The three arrows on the symbol represent different components of the recycling process. The top arrow represents the collection of recyclable materials. The second arrow (bottom right) represents the recyclables being processed into recycled products and the third arrow on the bottom left represents when the consumer actually buys a product with recycled content.

Recycling – the process of collecting, sorting, and reprocessing old material into usable raw materials.

Reduce – not using or buying products in the first place so less waste, less recycling and less reusing.

Renewable energy – alternative energy sources such as wind power or solar energy that can keep producing energy indefinitely without being used up.

Renewable resources – Like renewable energy, resources such as wind, sunlight and trees that regenerate. See [Non-renewable resources](#).

Reuse – before throwing away or recycling, a product that can be reused until its time to recycle.

S

Solar energy – energy from the sun.

Solar heating – heat from the sun is absorbed by collectors and transferred by pumps or fans to a storage unit for later use or to the house interior directly. Controls regulating the operation are needed. Or the heat can be transferred to water pumps for hot water.

Sulfur dioxide – SO₂ is a heavy, smelly gas which can be condensed into a clear liquid. It's used to make sulfuric acid, bleaching agents, preservatives and refrigerants and a major source of air pollution.

T

U

V

Vermicomposting – the process whereby worms feed on slowly decomposing materials (e.g., vegetable scraps) in a controlled environment to produce nutrient-rich soil.

W

WEEE – [Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment](#), your broken or not wanted electronic gadgets like mobile phones or computers.

Windpower – energy derived from the wind.

X

Y

Z

ⁱ“Adam,” <http://www.lifegoggles.com/652/the-green-glossary-environmental-terms-explained/>