

Glossary of Recycling & Solid Waste Terms

A

Advanced disposal fee (ADF) – A fee charged at the time of purchase. The funds usually go to support recycling and reduction programs.

Aerate – To expose to the circulation of air, as in aerating a compost pile.

Aerobic – Able to live and grow in the presence of free oxygen. Aerobic bacterial decomposition results in the conversion of organic wastes to compost.

Aluminum – A light, strong, silver-colored metal made mostly of bauxite ore. One of the most common materials accepted for recycling.

Amber glass – A term used by the glass industry to refer to brown glass.

America Recycles Day – A day held nationally every November 15 to celebrate the importance of recycling and buying recycled. Events are held throughout the country. People are asked to sign challenge cards, pledge to recycle and buy recycled. Contests and prizes are held on a national level.

Anaerobic – Able to live and grow only in the absence of free oxygen; anaerobic decomposition of organic wastes by bacteria results in the production and release of methane gas.

Aseptic packaging – Packaging used to make drink boxes, usually single-serve containers for juice. The boxes are made of aluminum foil, plastic and paper.

Ash - The primary residue left after something is burned.

Ash monofill – A specially constructed landfill to be used only for disposing ash from various types of incineration.

B

Bale – A large block of recyclables held together with plastic strapping.

Baler – A machine that compacts waste materials, usually into rectangular bales. Balers often are used on newspaper, plastics, and corrugated cardboard.

Bimetal container – A container made out of two metals. The body of the can is typically steel while the lid is aluminum. Examples include fruit, vegetables and soup cans.

Bioconversion – A general term describing the conversion of one form of energy into another by plants or microorganisms. An example is the digestion of solid wastes or sewage sludge by microorganisms to form methane.

Biodegradable – Capable of being broken down by microorganisms into simple, stable compounds such as carbon dioxide and water.

Bottle bill – A law requiring deposits on beverage containers. Proponents of this legislation believe that bottle bills encourage recycling. Opponents believe it is an unfair burden placed on an industry and does not improve recycling rates.

Bottom ash – The ash produced from incineration that must be disposed in a landfill.

Brown goods – Bulky household items that are difficult to recycle. Examples include mattresses and furniture.

Buy-back center – A place to sell recyclable materials.

Buy-back programs – Programs that buy recyclables from the public.

Buy recycled – Purchasing products made from or that contain materials with recycled content.

C

Cardboard – A kind of paper that is thicker, heavier and more rigid than other papers. It is

known as paperboard within the paper industry and includes corrugated boxes and boxboard (such as cereal boxes).

Cell – An area in a landfill where solid waste is disposed of each day.

Closed-loop recycling – A system in which materials are continually recycled into the same product. Examples include aluminum cans and glass bottles.

Commercial Waste – Waste material that originates in wholesale business establishments, office buildings, stores, schools, hospitals and government agencies. Also known as retail waste.

Commingled recyclable materials – A mixture of several recyclables in one container.

Compost – The product resulting from the decomposition of organic materials such as yard waste. Compost can be used as a soil conditioner.

Composting – The conversion of organic materials to humus by microorganisms. Composting is an effective solid waste management method for reducing the organic portion of waste, including lawn clippings, leaves, kitchen scraps and manure.

Compost pile – A place, such as an outside pit or bin, set aside for composting waste.

Conservation – The planned management of natural resources to prevent loss, destruction or waste.

Corrugated paper – Paper or cardboard manufactured in a series of wrinkles or folds or into alternating ridges and grooves.

Cover material – The soil used to cover solid waste in a landfill.

Cradle-to-grave – A system that manages solid waste from creation to disposal. In product design, it refers to its creation from raw or recycled materials through manufacturing, use, consumption and disposal.

Crumb rubber – Rubber that has been grounded into small pieces.

Cullet – Clean, generally color-sorted crushed glass used to make glass products.

Curbside collection – A recycling program where recyclable materials are collected from homes or places of business by municipal or private parties for transfer to a designated collection site or recycling facility.

D

Decompose – To break down into component parts or basic elements; decomposition of organic waste materials by bacteria is an essential life process because it makes essential nutrients available for use by plants and animals.

Degradable – Can be decomposed, or broken down, such as yard wastes in a compost pile.

Deinking – A process by which most of the ink, filler and other materials are removed from waste paper before using it to manufacture new paper.

Demolition debris – Waste materials produced during construction or remodeling including items such as lumber, masonry, gypsum wallboard, shingles and insulation.

Detinning – A process by which the thin tin coating is removed and recovered from steel cans.

Diversion rate – A measure of the amount of waste being diverted from the municipal solid waste stream, either through recycling or composting.

Do-it-yourselfer – A term for people who choose to change their own motor oil. These people are the focus of campaigns to get people to recycle their used motor oil.

Drop-off – A method of collecting recyclable materials where individuals take their recyclables to a designated collection site.

Drop-off center – A designated site in the community where individuals may bring recyclables. See recycling center.

Dump – an open, unmanaged, illegal disposal site used instead of a permitted landfill.

Dumpster – A large container to keep waste until it is collected by the trash hauler. Dumpsters often are used by stores, apartment buildings and restaurants.

E

Earth Day – Held on April 22 each year to promote awareness of environmental issues, the first Earth Day was in 1970.

Ecology – The scientific study of the relations of living things to one another and to their environment.

End users – A business or manufacturer that takes recyclable materials and converts them into new products.

Energy – The ability or capacity for doing work by body or a system. The measurement of the total heat in a system. Heat can be converted between a number of forms, including light, motion, electricity and warmth.

Energy audit – Examination of a building, original drawing, energy history and usage patterns to identify energy saving opportunities.

Energy Conservation – The practice of extending the useful life of the earth's energy resources through wise and efficient management.

Energy efficiency – Making energy consuming devices work with less energy.

Energy recovery – Recovering energy from waste. For example, used oil is burned to generate heat that produces electricity.

Environment – All the conditions, circumstances, and influences surrounding and affecting the development or existence of people or other living things.

Enviroshopping – The practice of making purchasing decisions based on the commitment to preserving the environment. Enviroshopping includes buying recycled products, products with a minimum of packaging and products that are not harmful when manufactured and can be recycled.

EPA – The acronym for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. It is the federal agency of the U.S. government that sets environmental protection and enforcement standards. The EPA was created in 1970 and serves the entire county through its regional offices.

E-waste – Electronic waste such as televisions and computers.

F

Ferrous metals – Metals that are predominantly composed of iron.

Fly ash – Small particles of ash and soot, which are collected by pollution, control devices during the incineration of solid wastes.

G

Garbage – Another word for solid waste, particularly household waste.

Glassphalt – A highway paving material in which recovered ground glass replaces some of the gravel in asphalt.

Green Seal – One of the first companies in the United States to award an environmental seal to products that meet certain environmental requirements.

Groundwater – Water beneath the earth's surface that moves between soil particles and rock; supplies wells and springs. In many places, these are used for drinking water.

H

High density polyethylene (HDPE) – A plastic resin commonly used to make milk jugs, detergent containers and base cups for plastic soda bottles. The standard plastic code for HDPE is #2.

High-grade waste paper – The most valuable waste paper in the marketplace. High-grade waste paper can be substituted for virgin wood pulp in making paper. Examples include letterhead stationary and computer paper.

Household hazardous materials (HHM) – Materials found around the home, usually in small amounts that can harm people or the environment. Examples of household hazardous materials include paint, pesticides, cleaning supplies and batteries. Because of the nature of household hazardous materials, they should be stored properly and disposed of separately from solid waste.

Humus – Organic material consisting of decayed vegetable matter that provides nutrients for plants. A natural, rich, soil conditioner that is the result of composting.

I

Incineration – The burning of waste.

Incinerator – A furnace for burning garbage or other refuse. A waste-to-energy incinerator burns waste to produce useful energy. Incinerators are federally regulated.

Industrial scrap – Waste generated during manufacturing operations.

Industrial waste – Waste that results from industrial processes, including factories and treatment plants.

Inorganic – Things that are not made from plants and animals and do not contain the element carbon, most inorganic compounds are derived from mineral resources.

Integrated solid waste management – The complementary use of a variety of practices to manage solid waste safely and effectively. Integrated waste management techniques include source reduction, recycling, composting and landfilling.

K

KAB – An abbreviation for Keep America Beautiful, a national, non-profit, public education organization dedicated to improving waste handling practices in American communities.

L

Landfill – A large, outdoor site for the burial of solid waste.

Landfilling – The disposal of solid waste at permitted facilities in a series of compacted layers on land with daily covering of the waste with soil. Fill areas are carefully prepared to prevent risk to public health waste per month.

Lead-acid battery – Any battery that consists of lead and sulfuric acid, has a capacity of six volts or more and is used as power source. A car battery is an example of a lead-acid battery.

Litter – Waste thrown away in an inappropriate place; improperly stored waste that has escaped from its container; misplaced solid waste.

Litterbug – A person who litters.

Littering – The act of intentionally or carelessly discarding solid waste in an inappropriate place.

Litter prevention – Activities and programs designed to encourage people not to litter.

Low density polyethylene (LDPE) – A plastic used in shopping bags and garbage bags. The standard plastic code for LDPE is #4.

M

Mandate recycling – Programs that by law require certain recycling practices or results.

Manual separation – The sorting of recyclables from other waste by hand.

Market – The area of economics activity in which buyers and sellers come together and where the forces of supply and demand affect prices.

Marine debris – Trash or litter in the water.

Materials recovery facility (MRF, pronounced “murf”) – A facility that sorts and processes collected recyclables for end users.

Mixed paper – Waste paper of various kinds and quality. Examples include stationary, notepads, manila folders, and envelopes.

Mixed waste – Unsorted waste from businesses or homes.

MRF – See *materials recovery facility*.

Mulch – A protective layer around plants to prevent evaporation. Yard waste that is chipped into small pieces and used in landscaping. It is not decomposed like compost.

Municipal solid waste (MSW) – The combined residential and commercial solid waste generated in an area. MSW includes paper, cans, bottles, food scraps, yard waste and other items. Industrial process waste, agricultural waste, mining waste and sewage sludge are not MSW.

Municipal solid waste landfill – Any landfill, publicly or privately owned that receives household waste. The landfill may also receive other types of solid waste, including commercial waste, non-hazardous sludge and industrial solid waste.

N

Natural recycling – A process by which organic material decomposes in nature, such as leaves decomposing in a forest.

Natural resources – Valuable, naturally-occurring items such as plants, animals, minerals, water and air that are used by people to help make things such as energy, food, clothing, and buildings.

Newsprint – An inexpensive paper made from wood pulp or recycled papers and used primarily for newspapers.

NIMBY – An acronym for ‘not in my back yard’ an expression of opposition for the siting of a waste facility near or in a community.

Nonbiodegradable – Does not degrade or break down in a compost pile.

Nonferrous metals – Metals such as aluminum, copper or brass that contains no iron.

Nonhazardous – Not considered dangerous.

Nonrecyclable – Cannot be recycled.

Nonrenewable resources – Natural resources which, because of their scarcity, the length of time required to form them, or their rapid depletion, are considered finite in amount, such as petroleum, coal, natural gas and copper.

O

Oil – Any of the various kinds of greasy, combustible substances obtained from animal, vegetables and mineral sources. Oils are liquid at ordinary temperatures and can be dissolved in certain organic solvents, but not in water. Petroleum is the most common form of oil.

Open drum – A large open area where trash is illegally thrown. These areas are also called illegal dumps.

Organic – An object containing the element carbon, such as plants and animals. Made from living organisms.

Organic waste – Discarded living material such as yard and food waste.

P

Packaging – The wrapper, container or plastic film used to protect, identify and advertise a product.

Paperboard – Heavyweight grades of paper commonly used for packaging products like cereal boxes. Paperboard is different from corrugated cardboard.

Paper stock – Waste paper that has been sorted into different grades.

Pay-as-you-throw (PAYT) – A program that promotes waste reduction by charging for waste disposal based on the weight or volume of the material. It works on the premise that the more you throw away the more you pay. In addition, the more you recycle the less you throw away and less you pay. Also known as variable rate.

Pesticides – Any substance designed to kill living organisms, including insects (insecticides), plants (herbicides), fungi (fungicides), rats and mice (rodenticides) and bacteria (germicides).

Plastic – A material made from hydrocarbons known for its lightweight and durability.

Pollution – Harmful substances deposited in the air, water, or on land, leading to contamination of the environment.

Pollution prevention – The reduction of waste and its associated pollution at the source by material substitutions or process modifications that generate less hazardous waste or less waste. Polyethylene – A common plastic used to make plastic bags (LDPE standard plastic code #4) and milk bottles (HDPE standard plastic code #2).

Polyethylene terephthalate (PET) – A plastic commonly used to make soft drink bottles and other food packaging like ketchup and salad dressing bottles. The standard plastic code for PET is #1.

Polypropylene (PP) – Plastic material that is used to manufacture dairy tubs, lids and straws. The standard plastic code for PP is #5.

Polystyrene (PS) – A lightweight plastic material often used in food services. Polystyrene products include tray, plates, bowls, cups and hinged containers. The standard plastic code for PS is #6.

Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) – Plastic material used to manufacture piping, food and cosmetic containers. The standard plastic code for PVC is #3.

Post-consumer materials – Recovered materials collected from consumer oriented recycling collection system or drop-off center.

Post-industrial – Scrap material generated as a result of an industrial manufacturer process.

Pre-consumer materials – Recovered materials obtained from manufacturers, such as cutting scraps from printers. Waste generated before the product reaches the consumer.

Precycle – To reduce waste at the source by changing buying habits.

Primary materials – Virgin or new materials, such as wood pulp and iron ore, used in making products.

Pulp – A soft, moist, sticky mass of fibers made up of wood, straw, etc., and used to make paper and paperboard.

R

Recyclable – Products or materials that can be collected, separated and processed to be used as raw materials in the manufacture of new products.

Recycle – To collect, separate, process and market materials so they can be used again.

Recycled content – The amount of a product's weight or package's weight that is composed of materials that have been recovered from waste. Recycled content may include pre-consumer and post-consumer materials.

Recycling Center – Drop-off sites that accept recyclables. Some sites also accept household garbage providing a one-stop services.

Reduce – To lessen in amount. Reducing trash is a major solid waste management goal.

Refurbish – Repair and make useful.

Refuse – A general term for solid waste materials, also called garbage or trash.

Refuse-derived fuel (RDF) – Fuel derived from the incineration of municipal solid waste.

Renewable – Energy resources that can be replenished, such as sunlight, water, geothermal heat and biomass.

Renewable resource – A natural resource derived from an endless or cyclical source (e.g., sun, wind, trees, fish); with proper management and wise use, replacement of these resources by natural or human-assisted systems can be approximately equal to their consumption.

Re-refining – To refine again. Used oil that is reprocessed into new oil products is considered re-refined.

Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) – Passed in 1976 and amended in 1984, it requires that new landfills be built with safeguards to reduce the potential of pollution.

Resource recovery – The burning of solid waste to produce energy. The processing of solid waste to make refuse-derived fuel. The extraction and use of materials or energy from the waste stream. The taking of usable materials out of solid waste, usually through high-technology processes.

Reuse – The use of a product more than once for any purpose. Examples include using a butter tub as an alternate food container or reusing a coffee can to hold nuts and bolts.

S

Sanitary landfill – See *municipal solid waste landfill*.

Scrap – Waste with some value, particularly material left over from construction or manufacturing suitable for reprocessing.

Solid waste – Trash and garbage. It also includes solid liquid, semi-solid or contained gaseous material resulting from industrial, commercial, mining and agricultural operations and community activities.

Solid Waste Disposal Act – A federal law passed in 1965 and amended in 1970 that addresses waste disposal methods, waste management and resource recovery.

Solid waste management – The handling, processing and disposal of all solid waste.

Solid waste stream – Anything that we throw away.

Source reduction – Another term for waste reduction. Behavior that deliberately reduces waste through educated consumer choices and disposal.

Source separation – Separating recyclable materials at the source, such as at home or office.

Subtitle D – The non-hazardous waste section of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA). Subtitle D provides specific information about landfill design, operation and closure.

Sustainability – The practice of not taking from the earth those things that cannot be replaced.

Sustainability development – The ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. An environmental protection strategy designed to protect the earth's resources.

T

Throwaway life style – A phrase describing modern life with many disposable products and short-lived goods.

Tin can – A steel can with a thin, tin coating. Also known as bimetal can.

Tipping fee – The price individuals, communities and trash hauler pay to dispose of their waste at a landfill.

Tons per day (TPD) – Used as a measurement of the solid waste disposal rate at a landfill, incinerator or materials recovery facility.

Transfer station – A facility where waste is removed from small collection vehicles and loaded onto larger transport vehicles.

Trash – Material considered worthless, unnecessary or offensive that is usually thrown away.

U

UBC – An acronym for used beverage container, usually plastic soda bottles and aluminum cans.

Used motor oil – Motor oil that has been used in an engine and is considered to be waste. This oil can be recycled.

V

Variable rate – See *pay-as-you-throw*.

Vermicomposting – The production of compost using worms to digest organic waste.

Vinyl (V) – A common type of plastic used to make shampoo bottles and other containers. The standard plastic code is #3.

Virgin materials – Any basic material for industrial processes that has not been used. Another term for raw materials. Examples include timber or metal ore.

W

Waste – Anything that is discarded or not considered useful.

Waste assessment – The review of processes to identify options that will result in either the generation of less waste or the productive recycling of materials that would otherwise be added to the waste stream.

Waste audit – An inventory of the amount and type of solid waste that is produced at a specific location.

Waste exchange – A program that helps companies offer some of their hazardous waste by-product to other companies that may be able to use these wastes in their business.

Waste minimization – The reduction of the amount of waste generated by pollution prevention methods or recycling of by-product that would otherwise be added to the waste stream.

Waste reduction – an important waste management strategy that encourages people to generate less trash through practices such as reuse, recycling and buying products with less packaging.

Waste stream – All waste generated in an area or a facility.

Waste-to-energy plants – Facilities that burn solid waste, gases or chemicals to produce energy.

White goods – Appliances such as refrigerators, stoves, water heaters, washing machines, dryers and air conditioners.

Worm castings – Worm manure.

X-Y-Z

Yard waste – Grass clippings, shrub prunings, leaves, tree branches and other discarded material from yards and gardens.

The above information was developed by the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. This and other recycling information can be found on their website at www.scdhec.net/recycle.