

# A-Z OF SUSTAINABILITY

A handy guide to the most commonly used sustainability terms



## **Agricultural Waste**

Waste including manure, harvesting, and pesticides that enter into water, air or soil produced from agricultural operations.

## **Anaerobic Digestion**

The decomposition of organic waste material in a controlled environment where bacteria breaks down the organic material in the absence of oxygen. This process produces biogas, a methane-rich gas that can be used as renewable energy and liquid digestate and solid digestate, which are used as fertilisers. This disposal method is typically used for disposal of food waste.

## **Asbestos**

A heat-resistant fibrous mineral that can be woven into fabrics, and is used in brake linings and in fire-resistant and insulating materials. Asbestos is highly toxic and must be disposed of by a specialist.



## **Bale**

Recyclables are collected and added into a 'baler' the materials are compressed into a 'Bale' - a large cube.

## **Biodegradable**

A product or item able to decay via bacteria or other living organisms naturally and without harming the environment.

## **Business Waste**

Waste produced by commercial and industrial businesses. Also see commercial waste, trade waste or industrial waste.

## **Bulky Waste**

General waste items too large to put into a standard bin including unwanted furniture, desks, draws and filing cabinets.

## **B Corp**

B Corp (or B Corporations) certification means that brands are certified by B Lab they meet high standards of sustainability, such as social and environmental performance, transparency and accountability.

## **Biodegradable**

When the materials naturally break down over time thanks to organisms in the environment, without causing any harm to the planet.



## Carbon Neutral

Working towards carbon neutrality means aiming to have less of an impact on the planet, by minimising and counteracting carbon emissions. Being carbon neutral means that the amount of carbon dioxide produced (from doing things like burning fossil fuels) is equal to or less than the amount of carbon dioxide being captured or taken away from the environment.

## Carbon Footprint

Carbon footprint is a way to measure the amount of carbon dioxide put into our atmosphere, either by an individual, a business, an organisation or a whole community.

## Circularity

Circularity is a system where products and materials are continuously reused, repaired, and recycled, rather than being disposed of. This approach aims to minimise waste and environmental impact by keeping resources in use for as long as possible, creating a closed-loop system. It's about designing out waste and pollution, keeping products and materials in use, and regenerating natural systems.

## Commodity

Materials that can be bought and sold back to market for reuse such as pallets, glass and metals.

## Clinical Waste

Healthcare waste is waste produced during human or animal healthcare, or related research activities. This may be a sharp, or body fluid, or other biological material (including human and animal tissue).

## Commercial Waste

Various waste types produced by commercial premises such as offices, hair salons, restaurants, factories, wholesale, manufacturing, or retail. Also see Business or Trade Waste.

## Contamination

Other waste or substances that affect the quality of materials to be recycled making them unrecyclable. This can be food residue on cardboard or plastic packaging.



## **Dry Mixed Recycling (DMR)**

You will probably hear Dry Mixed Recycling or DMR a lot. This is the term for recyclables that are collected together in one service. DMR comprises of paper, cardboard, newspapers and magazines, plastics, tins and cans.

## **Diversion**

This is the waste that is 'diverted' away from landfill.

## **Duty of Care**

If you produce, store, transport or dispose of domestic and/or commercial rubbish you are required to treat the public and the environment with consideration and respect for health and safety reasons.



## **Eco-anxiety**

Eco-anxiety is defined as "a chronic fear of environmental doom", which occurs when the worry about climate change takes over your daily thoughts and day-to-day life.

## **Energy from Waste (EfW)**

An alternative to landfill - the process of creating energy in the form of electricity or heat from the incineration of waste materials.

## **Environment Agency (EA)**

Public body with responsibilities relating to the protection and enhancement of the environment in England.

## **Extended Producer Responsibility**

Producers are given a responsibility (financial and/or physical) for the treatment and /or disposal of post-consumer products.

## **E-Waste**

Broken or unwanted electrical items such as televisions, computers, mobile phones, basically anything that has a plug or needs to be charged. E-Waste needs specialist disposal and must not be put into general or recycling bins. Also see WEEE Waste.



## **Fly-tipping**

Illegally dumping any type of waste on land that is not licensed to accept it. Highways, footpaths, hedgerows etc.

## **Ferrous Metals**

Metals that contain iron including steel, lead and mercury, they are also magnetic and can be easily shaped or formed.



### **Fluorescent Tube (Flo Tubes)**

A glass tube which radiates light when phosphor on its inside surface is made to fluoresce by ultraviolet radiation from mercury vapour. These are hazardous waste and must be disposed of as such. Also see Hazardous Waste.

### **Front End Loader (FEL)**

A large waste container used for high volumes of waste. These containers are generally lockable and loaded onto specialist vehicles for collection from the front hence the name.



### **General Waste**

Waste that can not be recycled, also known as residual waste. Usually items that such as foil, crisp packets and soiled packaging.

### **Green Energy**

Energy produced from a non-polluting source such as wind turbines or solar panels. Also see Renewable Energy.

### **Greenhouse Effect**

The Greenhouse effects occurs when gases in earth's atmosphere trap the heat from the sun, heating up our planet. When at its natural level, this is vital for life to survive on our planet. However, burning fossil fuels – such as coal and oil – puts more carbon dioxide into our atmosphere and changes Earth's natural levels.

### **Greenwashing**

Greenwashing refers to the practice of promoting environmental initiatives or products that a company has not actually implemented. Creating misleading information that makes consumers believe a company is more environmentally friendly than it actually is, making it harder for consumers to make informed decisions and genuinely support sustainable practices.



### **Incineration**

Thermal treatment of waste with or without the recovery of the combustion heat to generate energy. Also see Energy from Waste (EfW).

### **IPCC**

IPCC stands for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – a United Nations body that assesses the science behind climate change. It releases important reports on the current climate crisis, including its impact, future risk and how we can reduce its rate.



## **Landfill**

A designated area of land where waste that can not be recycled or incinerated is buried in excavated pits which are usually covered with soil once full. Waste disposed of at Landfill is subject to 'Landfill Tax'. A government tax to discourage this as a form of disposal.

## **Lift**

Industry terminology for when your bin is collected. Lift Rate - the term used for the price per bin per lift (or empty).



## **Material Recycling Facility (MRF)**

A specialist facility designed to receive, separate and prepare recyclable materials for marketing to end-user manufacturers.

## **Material Biological Treatment (MBT)**

Commonly used to treat municipal solid waste, MBT can deal with both mixed waste and source-separated waste. A waste processing facility that combines a sorting facility with a form of biological treatment such as composting or anaerobic digestion.



## **Net Zero**

Net Zero is when greenhouse gases – including carbon dioxide and methane – that end up in our atmosphere are balanced out by removal or offsetting.

## **Non-Ferrous Metal**

Metals that do not contain iron such as aluminium, copper and brass. Non-ferrous metals are non-magnetic, which make them suitable for many electrical and electronic applications.



## **Organic Waste**

The term is often used to describe materials that can be decomposed by microorganisms, such as paper, food waste or garden trimmings.



## **Pre-Consumer**

Reused/recycled materials before they go to market, during the manufacturing process.

## **Post-Consumer**

Material or item used by the consumer for its original purpose and then discarded. An item reused/recycled after it has been utilised by the consumer (e.g. a newspaper sent back to the paper mill to be recycled into new paper products).



## **Polypropylene (PP)**

Type of plastic commonly used to make margarine tubs and microwaveable meal trays. Can be recognised by a number five inside a triangle on the packaging.

## **Polymer**

Plastic bottles, films, cups, and fibres are types of manufactured polymers called thermoplastic plastics as they can be melted. Most polymers, including poly(ethene) and poly(propene), are not biodegradable. This means that microorganisms cannot break them and therefore can not be recycled.

## **Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET)**

Common polymer of the polyester family used for clothing and containers including fizzy drink containers, water bottles and salad trays. Recognised by a number two inside a triangle on the packaging.



## **Resources Recovery Facility**

Specialist facility processing waste to reclaim energy from solid waste.

## **Roll On Roll Off (RoRo)**

A long large skip-like container used for high volumes of waste. They are collected on large vehicles that use rollers to roll on and off the containers instead of lifting them.

## **Reprocessor**

A company who recycles materials, only accredited reprocessors can issue PRNs.

## **Rental Charges**

A charge for the containers your waste is collected in to be delivered and used.

## **Recovery**

This term is used when waste has been disposed of via an alternative method to landfill.

## **Rear-End Loader (REL)**

Specialist type of waste collection vehicle that empties containers by tipping it over the rear of the vehicle.

## **Residual Waste**

Left-over waste material from household and businesses that cannot be reused or recycled.

## **Refuse**

Another term for rubbish; it can be used to refer to general waste and DMR from both households and businesses.



## R

### Reuse

Reuse is when items are used again for their initial purpose and do not go through a recycling or waste process.

### Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF)

A type of fuel produced from various types of waste, including domestic and business waste. Non-combustible materials such as glass and metals are removed, and any residual material is shredded.

### Recycling

When used materials are processed into new products in order to reduce the usage of raw materials.



## S

### Skip

A type of large waste container often used for construction and demolition waste or other larger waste types.

### Skip Permit

Official document needed if the skip is to be placed on a public highway. Generally supplied by the skip provider.

### Sharps

A waste stream collected separately made up of items including; Hypodermic needles, blades, and knives.

### Single Stream Recycling

Waste streams are segregated into separate bins by the users. Usually plastic, paper, food, metal, card and wood.



## T

### Textiles

A growing issue within the waste industry, fabrics such as clothes, rags, dishcloths.

### Traceability

Traceability is the ability to track the journey of a product or material through each stage of its lifecycle, from production to disposal.

In the waste management industry, traceability is crucial for ensuring that waste is handled responsibly and sustainably. Ensuring materials are properly sorted, recycled, or disposed of in the most environmentally friendly manner is a must. Maintaining detailed records ensures transparency, traceability and helps prevent illegal dumping, reduce contamination, and promote accountability.

### Transfer Station

A specific building used to deposit the waste before loading it into larger vehicles which transport the waste to the end point of disposal (Landfill) or treatment (MRF).





## Upcycling

Upcycling is transforming waste materials or unwanted products into new items of higher value or quality. Unlike recycling, which typically breaks down materials to create something new, upcycling creatively repurposes items, giving them a second life without extensive processing.

Upcycling not only reduces waste but also conserves resources and energy, making it a sustainable alternative to traditional disposal methods. Upcycling can be applied to a wide range of materials, from clothing and furniture to electronics and packaging, encouraging innovation and environmental responsibility.



## Virgin Materials

Unused raw material that has never been subjected to any processing other than for its production.



## Waste Transfer Note (WTN)

A legal document required when waste is transferred from one party to another, ensuring the waste can be traced from production to disposal and checked by the EA or local authority at any time.

## Waste Hierarchy

A widely recognised framework used for managing waste, giving priority to preventing waste, then re-use, recycling, and other recovery such as energy recovery, and last of all, disposal.

## Waste Collector / Operative

A person whose job is to collect waste bins from household or commercial premises or sort waste on a picking line at a waste facility.

## Waste Audit

Greenzone will discuss and evaluate your current waste production and disposal systems over the phone (desktop audit) or by visiting your site/s. Following this Greenzone will advise of any changes or improvements to maximise recycling rates and service levels.

## Waste Safe

A lockable container designed to handle hazardous materials.

## Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE)

Broken or unwanted electrical items such as televisions, computers, mobile phones, basically anything that has a plug or needs to be charged. E-Waste needs specialist disposal and must not be put into general or recycling bins. Also see E-Waste.

## Waste and Resources Action Programme -WRAP

WRAP is a UK based non-profit recycling advocate, a useful resource: [www.wrap.org.uk](http://www.wrap.org.uk)