

Glossary of Commonly Used Terms

The Federal Trade Commission, in cooperation with the EPA, has developed guidelines for advertisers to ensure that environmental marketing claims don't mislead buyers. Listed below are some tips to help you sort through environmental claims.

Biodegradable - Materials such as food and leaves break down and decompose into elements found in nature when they are exposed to air, moisture and bacteria. Cleaning products, such as detergents and shampoos, often display "biodegradable" claims. Most of these products have always degraded in wastewater systems, causing no harm to the environment.

CFCs (Chlorofluorocarbons) - These are chemical substances that can deplete the earth's protective ozone layer in the upper atmosphere. The ozone layer in the upper atmosphere is necessary to prevent the sun's harmful radiation from reaching the earth. In the late 1970s, CFCs were banned from use as propellant in most consumer aerosol products and they are gradually being phased out.

Compostable - Degradable materials are turned into a useable compost-humus-like material that enriches the soil and returns nutrients to the earth. This may apply to products or packaging that will break down, or that become part of a useable compost in a safe and timely manner in compost piles.

Mill Broke - Any paper waste generated in a paper mill prior to completion of the paper-making process. It is not counted toward post-consumer or recovered fiber content. If a mill uses less than 100% post-consumer or recovered fiber, only a proportional amount of broke can be counted towards post-consumer or recovered fiber content.

Photodegradable - Usually plastic materials which disintegrate into smaller pieces when exposed to enough sunlight. Degradation of any material occurs very slowly in landfills, where most garbage is taken. The reason is the law requires that modern landfills be designed to keep sunlight, air and moisture out of the landfill. The design prevents pollutants from leaking out of the garbage and from entering the air and drinking water. Because of this, it slows decomposition.

Recovered Fiber - Post-consumer fiber plus manufacturing wastes such as dry paper and paperboard waste generated after completion of the paper-making process (cutting and trimming of the paper machine reel into smaller rolls or rough sheets).

Recyclable - Products that are collected, separated or recovered from the solid waste stream and used again, or reused in the manufacture or assembly of another package or product through an established recycling program.

Recycled Content - When you evaluate an environmental claim, you should determine if the claim applies to the product, the packaging, or both. If a label says "recycled," check how much of the product or package is recycled. The label must tell you how much is recycled unless the product or package contains 100% recycled materials and it should tell you where the recycled material comes from.

- **Post-Consumer** - Material that comes from previously used products such as newspapers, shipping cartons, plastic bottles, glass containers and aluminum cans.
- **Pre-Consumer** - Essentially manufacturing waste, such as clippings left over from manufacturing processes and then the clippings could be made into other like products instead of being tossed.

Source Reduction - Reducing or lowering the weight, volume or toxicity of a product or package. Source reduction claims must qualify the amount of source reduction and give the basis for any comparison that is made.

VOCs (Volatile Organic Compounds) - These substances contribute to the formation of ground-level ozone, or smog. Alcohols, butane, propane and isobutene are common VOCs. Emissions from cars and factories are the major source of VOC releases to the environment, but household cleaning products, floor polishes, charcoal lighter fluid, windshield wiper fluid, hair styling spray, gel or mousse, whether in aerosol cans or spray pumps, also may contain these substances and contribute to smog problems.

A. FTC (Federal Trade Commission) <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/general/gen02.shtm>

B. EPA Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines <http://www.epa.gov/wastes/conservation/tools/cpg/products/define.htm>