



Biodegradable: the property of a substance that permits it to be broken down by microorganisms into simple, stable compounds such as carbon dioxide and water. (see *decompose*)

Bottle Bill: a law requiring deposits on beverage containers like aluminum cans and plastic bottles which may discourage littering and landfilling. More accurately called a Beverage Container Deposit Law.

Composting: a waste management process that creates an optimal environment for decomposition by layering organic wastes like food scraps and grass clippings so they will decay into a fertile humus.

Conserve: to protect from loss or depletion. Conservation is the wise use of natural resources to minimize loss and waste.

Consumer: one who uses up or expends goods, such as food, electronics, textiles, and other products.

Decompose: to break down into component parts or basic elements; to rot. Decomposition is an organic process necessary for the continuation of life since it makes essential nutrients available for use by plants and animals.

Disposable: usually made for one-time use, or limited usage before disposal. (e.g., disposable paper cups)

Dump: an open, unsanitary disposal site used before the existence of present day licensed and controlled burial sanitary landfills.

Durable: designed to last a very long time.

Energy recovery: the generation of energy by burning solid waste.

E-waste: electronic items that are at the end of their useful life.

Fossil fuels: an energy source such as coal, oil or natural gas, formed in the earth from plant or animal remains, and are considered to be finite, or non-renewable natural resources.

Garbage: spoiled or waste food that is thrown away. Generally defined as wet food waste and excludes dry material (trash). The term is often used interchangeably with the word "trash."

Groundwater: water beneath the earth's surface that fills the spaces, and flows in between soil particles and rock. Supplies wells and springs. Two out of every three Wisconsin citizens drink groundwater.

Hazardous materials: toxins that can cause special problems for living organisms or the environment because they are poisonous, explosive, burns or dissolves flesh or metal, ignites easily with or without a flame, or carries disease.

Humus: organic material consisting of decayed vegetable matter that provides nutrients for plants and increases the ability of the soil to retain water.

Hydrocarbons: an organic compound (such as acetylene or butane) containing only carbon and hydrogen and often occurring in plastics, petroleum, natural gas, and coal.

Industrial waste: the waste that industries (e.g., power plants and paper mills) generate as they produce the products we use.

Incinerator ash: the sometimes hazardous bi-product from incinerators that burn waste. Incinerator ash can contain levels of lead, cadmium, benzene and dioxin.

Inorganic: being or composed of matter other than plant or animal organisms.

Landfill: a site for the controlled burial of solid waste.

Leachate: liquid that has percolated through solid waste and/or been generated by solid waste decomposition, and contains extracted, dissolved or suspended materials. May contaminate ground or surface water.

Litter: waste materials discarded in an inappropriate place. Littering is illegal in Wisconsin.

Materials recovery facility: a facility designed to sort and transport recyclable materials such as paper, aluminum, glass and plastic to facilities where they will be reused.

Methane gas: a colorless, odorless, flammable and potentially dangerous, gaseous hydrocarbon (CH₄) present in natural gas and formed by the decomposition of organic matter. Can be used as a fuel.

Municipal solid waste: all solid, semi-solid, liquid and gaseous wastes; including trash, garbage, yard waste, ashes, commercial waste, and household discards such as appliances, furniture and equipment.

Natural resource: a valuable, naturally occurring material such as soil, wood, air, water, oil or minerals.

Non-renewable resource: a natural material that, due to its scarcity, the great length of time required for its formation, or its rapid depletion, is considered finite in amount (e.g., coal, copper, petroleum).

Non-municipal waste: see *industrial waste*

Open burning: the burning of any combustible material outdoors without any air pollution controls in place. Burning in an unconfined area, a container or a pile are all considered to be open burning. Open burning of recyclables is illegal in Wisconsin.

Organic: derived from living organisms.

Pollution: harmful substances deposited in the environment that can lead to a state of dirtiness, impurity or unhealthiness.

Recycle: the collection and reprocessing of manufactured materials for remanufacture, either in the same form or as part of a different product.

Raw material: an unprocessed natural resource or product used in manufacturing.

Recycled: to have been passed again through a series of changes or treatments in order to regain material for human use.

Reduce: to lessen in extent, amount, number or other quantity.

Renewable resource: a natural resource derived from an endless or cyclical source (e.g., sun, wind, water, fish, trees, cotton). With proper management and wise use, the replacement of these resources by natural or human-assisted systems can equal or exceed their consumption.

Reuse: to extend the life of an item by using it again in some way, such as, repairing it, modifying it or creating new uses for it.

Reusable: see *reuse*

Sanitary landfill: a specially engineered site for the disposal of solid waste on land. These landfills are constructed in a way that reduces hazards to health and safety.

Solid waste management: the controlling, handling and disposal of all solid waste. One goal of solid waste management is to reduce waste to a minimum.

Source reduction: a reduction in the amount of , and/or toxicity of a waste before it enters the waste stream; also called waste prevention.

Sustainable: a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged.

Toxins/toxic: a poisonous substance that is usually very unstable, or harmful when introduced into human, animal or plant tissue.

Trash: material considered worthless, unnecessary or offensive, that is usually thrown away. Trash is generally defined as dry material and excludes food waste (garbage) and ashes. However, the term is often used interchangeably with the word "garbage."

