



Glossary of Terms

Abiotic: Non-living physical and chemical components of the ecosystem, such as water, oxygen, and sunlight.

Aquifer: A large underground area of water-bearing sand and gravel deposits.

Biotic: Living components of the ecosystem, such as plants, animals, and microorganisms.

Composting: The controlled decomposition of organic (natural) materials.

Environment: A combination of the interactions between living (biotic) and non-living (abiotic) components. Living things function and interact with their physical environments and can cause changes in the environment where they live.

Landfill: A place where trash is buried between layers of compacted land.

Materials Recovery Facility (MRF): A place where waste is received, sorted, and processed for recycling.

Natural Resource: Any material, substance, or organism found in nature that is useful to people. Air, water, soil, wildlife, minerals, and fossil fuels are examples of natural resources.

Nonrenewable Energy: Energy that comes from resources that cannot be replenished, such as energy from coal, oil, and natural gas.

Nonrenewable Resource: One that cannot be replenished with the same speed by which it is consumed. Oil, natural gas, and coal are nonrenewable.

Recycling: The process of taking materials ready to be thrown away and changing them into new products.

Renewable Energy: Energy that comes from resources that restore themselves after a short period of time and do not diminish, such as energy from the sun, wind, moving water, plant, and waste material (biomass), and the earth's heat (geothermal).

Renewable Resource: One that can be replenished at a similar rate to its use by people. Water, solar energy, and biomass are renewable.

Solid Waste: Unwanted materials and objects that people have thrown away. Also referred to as trash, refuse.

Sustainability: The idea that humans must interact with the environment in a way that ensures there will be enough resources left for future generations.

Transfer Station: A place where solid waste (trash, refuse) is transferred from small vehicles to large trucks for transport to a landfill or other disposal site.

Wastewater: Used water from homes, businesses, and stormwater runoff. Wastewater can include things like human waste, food scraps, chemicals, and oils. In homes, wastewater comes from our sinks, toilets, bathtubs, washing machines, and dishwashers.