

# Glossary of Sustainability and Environmental Terms

**Air pollutant:** Any substance in air that could, in high enough concentration, harm humans, animals, vegetation, or material.

**Air pollution:** The presence of contaminants or pollutant substances in the air that interfere with human health or welfare, or produce other harmful environmental effects.

**Biodegradable:** Capable of decomposing under natural conditions.

**Biodiversity:** The number, variety, and variability of living organisms.

**Byproduct:** Material, other than the principal product, generated as a consequence of an industrial process or as a breakdown product in a living system.

**Carcinogen:** Any substance that can cause or aggravate cancer.

**Chemicals of concern:** A chemical that makes a significant contribution to one or more of the following life cycle impact categories:

- Persistent, bioaccumulative, and toxic (PBT)
- Reproductive toxicant
- Carcinogen
- Endocrine disruptor

**Child labor:** Exploitation of workers under the minimum legal age for employment in the country where the facility operates.

**Conformity assessments:** Demonstration that specified requirements relating to a product, process, system, person, or body are fulfilled.

**First party conformity assessment:** Conformity assessment activity that is performed by the person or organization that provides the object.

**Second party conformity assessment:** Conformity assessment activity that is performed by a person or organization that has a user or purchaser interest in the object.

**Third party conformity assessment:** Conformity assessment activity that is performed by a person or body that is independent of the person or organization that provides the object, and of the user or purchaser interests in that object.

**Cradle-to-gate:** A term used to describe the life cycle assessment boundary encompassing the life cycle stages of raw material extraction and conversion to a bulk form or a generic shape.

**Criteria (air) pollutants:** The 1970 amendments to the Clean Air Act required the Environmental Protection Agency to set National Ambient Air Quality Standards for certain pollutants known to be hazardous to human health. EPA has identified and set



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standards to protect human health and welfare for six pollutants: ozone, carbon monoxide, total suspended particulates, sulfur dioxide, lead, and nitrogen oxide. The term "criteria pollutants" derives from the requirement that EPA must describe the characteristics and potential health and welfare effects of these pollutants. It is on the basis of these criteria that standards are set or revised.

**Design for the environment (DfE):** The systematic integration of environmental attributes into the design of products and processes. There are three unique characteristics of DfE:

- The entire life cycle is considered
- Point of application is clearly in the product realization
- Decisions are made using a set of values consistent with industrial ecology, integrative systems thinking, or another framework.

**Ecosystem:** The interacting system of a biological community and its non-living environmental surroundings.

**Environment:** The sum of all external conditions affecting the life, development, and survival of an organism.

**Environmental aspect:** An element of an organization's activities, products, or services that can interact with the environment.

**Environmental policy:** A statement by an organization of its intentions and principles in relation to its overall environmental performance, which provides a framework for action and for the setting of its environmental objectives and targets.

**Environmental management system:** The part of a company's overall management system that includes organizational structure, planning activities, responsibilities, practices, procedures, processes, and resources for developing, implementing, achieving, reviewing, and maintaining the environmental policy.

**Forced labor:** Compulsory prison or debt bondage labor. Lodging of deposits or identity papers by employers or outside recruiters for the purpose of restricting or preventing the individual from leaving employment.

**Fossil fuel:** Fuel derived from ancient organic remains. Some examples are peat, coal, crude oil, and natural gas.

**Gate-to-gate:** A term used to describe the product boundary encompassing the fabrication and assembly of business and institutional furniture. For purposes of the assessment, the entry gate is the receiving dock of the first facility where basic materials used in the manufacture of the furniture (e.g. steel, particleboard, fabric, laminate, etc.) begins the conversion to furniture components. The end gate is the shipping dock where the ready-to-install furniture is transported for distribution to the end user. The gate-to-gate assessment will include transportation of intermediate materials and components between facilities where more than one physical location is included in the manufacturing process.



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**Greenhouse gas (GHG):** Gases related to human activities that accelerate the greenhouse effect.

**Hazardous substances (materials):**

- Any substance that poses a threat to human health and/or the environment. Typical hazardous substances are toxic, corrosive, ignitable, explosive, or chemically reactive.
- Any substance designated by EPA to be reported if a designated quantity of the substance is spilled in the waters of the United States or is otherwise released into the environment.

**Incidental presence:** The presence of a regulated metal (e.g., cadmium, lead, mercury, hexavalent chromium) as an unintended or undesired ingredient of a package or packaging component.

**Legacy products:** Business and institutional furniture products manufactured for sale prior to the publication date of the BIFMA Sustainability Standard.

**Life cycle:** The total impact of a system, function, product, or service from the extraction of raw materials through its end-of-life management.

**Life cycle assessment (LCA):** A tool for the systematic evaluation of the environmental aspects of a product or service system through all stages of its life cycle consistent with ISO 14040. An analytical tool to implement life cycle thinking, inclusive of both product and process. An LCA is generally quantitative and requires that the results be normalized to a functional unit.

**Life cycle inventory (LCI):** A process of quantifying energy and raw material requirements, atmospheric emissions, waterborne emissions, solid wastes, and other releases for the entire life cycle of a product, process, or activity.

**Life cycle thinking:** A conceptual approach that addresses environmental problems from a whole-systems or holistic perspective. The essential difference from an LCA is that the results are not normalized to a functional unit, and the results may be expressed qualitatively or quantitatively.

**Maintenance chemical:** A chemical not directly used in the manufacturing of the product (e.g. forklift engine oil).

**Package:** A container providing a means of marketing, protection, or handling of a product and shall include a unit package, an intermediate package, and a shipping/transport container as defined in American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) D 996. "Package" shall also mean and include such unsealed receptacles as carrying cases, crates, cups, pails, rigid foil, and other trays, wrappers and wrapping films, bags, and tubs.

**Packaging component:** Any individual assembled part of a package such as, but not limited to, any interior or exterior blocking, bracing, cushioning, weatherproofing, exterior strapping, coatings, closures, inks, and labels.



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**Post-consumer:** Generated by households, or by commercial, industrial, and institutional facilities in their role as end users of the product, which can no longer be used for its intended purpose. This includes return of materials from the distribution chain.

**Post-industrial (pre-consumer):** Diverted from the waste stream during the manufacturing process. Excluded is reutilization of materials such as rework, regrind, or scrap generated in a process and capable of being reclaimed within the same process that generated it.

**Pollution:** Generally, the presence of a substance in the environment that because of its chemical composition or quantity prevents the functioning of natural processes and produces undesirable environmental and health effects.

**Process chemical:** Used in the direct manufacturing of the product and is not intended to be incorporated into the product as shipped (e.g. prep solvent prior to powdercoat).

**Product chemical:** Incorporated in or on the product as shipped (e.g. wood finish).

**Recovered material:** Waste materials and byproducts that have been recovered or diverted from solid waste, but does not include materials and byproducts generated from, and commonly reused within, an original manufacturing process.

**Recyclable:** Capable of minimizing waste generation by recovering and reprocessing usable products that might otherwise become waste.

**Recycle:** To minimize waste generation by recovering and reprocessing usable products that might otherwise become waste (e.g., aluminum cans, paper and bottles, etc.).

**Recycled-content materials:** Materials that have been recovered or otherwise diverted from the solid waste stream, either during the manufacturing process (post-industrial) or after consumer use (post-consumer).

**Remanufacturing:** Restoring products to usable condition by replacing or repairing parts as needed.

**Renewable energy:** Energy from a source that is replenishable and replenished on some reasonable time scale. Potential renewable energy sources include, but are not limited to, wind, solar, heat from the earth's interior, oceans, rivers, and biomass.

**Renewable material:** A material that is replenishable and replenished on some reasonable time scale. Renewable material sources include, but are not limited to, wood, grass fibers, plant-based plastics, and bio-based fuels.

**Reusable packaging:** Packaging that has been conceived and designed to accomplish within its life cycle a minimum number of trips or rotations, is refilled or used for the same purpose for which it was conceived, with or without the support of auxiliary products present on the market enabling the packaging to be refilled. Such reused packaging will become packaging waste when no longer subject to reuse.



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**Significant environmental aspect:** An environmental characteristic that has or can have significant environmental impact.

**Social responsibility (or equity):** The identification of issues, the development of standards, and the implementation of programs that address corporate responsibility for the ethical treatment of employees, communities, and other stakeholders.

**Solid waste:** Non-liquid, non-soluble materials ranging from municipal garbage to industrial waste that may contain complex and sometimes hazardous substances.

**Source reduction:** A pollution prevention technique that eliminates the potential for pollution at the source, or where the polluting material enters the product or service cycle.

**Stakeholders:** People who are (or might be) affected by any action taken by an organization. Examples are customers, owners, employees, associates, partners, contractors, suppliers, related people or located nearby.

**Sustainable development:** Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

**Toxic:** Presenting an unreasonable risk of injury to human health or the environment.

**Triple bottom line:** Sustainable development involves the simultaneous pursuit of economic vitality, ecological integrity, and social equity. Companies aiming for sustainability need to perform not against a single, financial bottom line, but against the triple bottom line.

**Waste:** Unwanted materials left over from a manufacturing process, or refuse from places of human or animal habitation.

Thanks to BIFMA for creating this glossary in the e3 Sustainability Standard.



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