

Green Glossary

by Danielle Hope Hier

I was once a "green fledgling," a well-intentioned novice in eco-friendliness. Sure, I recycled, turned off unused lights, and purchased energy-saving electronics, but that's about where my experience ended.

Working in Sarasota (one of the U.S.'s greenest cities), launched me into a world of consciousness that had me running to the dictionary with every new word I encountered on the street or in articles I read on things like Climate Change and Geothermal Energy. It was as if I were learning a new language, visiting Paris with my English-French dictionary.

So, for all of you green babies out there, I've compiled a very basic starter list of eco-lingo that should save you time, and also prepare you for "Efest Speak."

Biodegradable – Materials that will decompose naturally in the earth (without harming the environment).

Biofuels – Organic alternatives to burning fossil fuels as a source of energy.

Biological Diversity or Biodiversity – The variety of species (i.e. vertebrates, plants, algae, etc.) that occupy a given habitat. A balanced habitat will have enough natural resources to sustain all living organisms within that habitat.

Carbon Neutral – Something which absorbs carbon dioxide or emits no CO₂ into the atmosphere.

Carbon Offsetting – Neutralizing personal effects of carbon emissions into the atmosphere through alternative means (i.e., planting trees to compensate for extensive air travel).

Climate Change – Long-term variations in weather conditions (i.e. humidity, wind levels, precipitation) within a region and globally.

Composting – Mixing and using leaves, manure, vegetables, and other decayed organic matter as fertilizer.

Ecological Footprint – A person's individual impact on the environment gained by measuring his or her use of natural resources over time.

Ecosystem/Ecological System – An environment whereby living organisms live in balance with one another.

Energy Star – A government program started in 1992 by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to promote energy efficient consumer products.

Ethanol – An alcohol proposed as a renewable clean-burning additive to gasoline.

Evapotranspiration – Process of converting earth's water into the atmosphere as vapor through evaporation, transpiration, or sublimation.

Fair Trade – An agreement between producers and consumers that promises fair employee wages and products that are ecologically friendly.

Fossil Fuels – Energy sources (hydrocarbons) derived from fossilized remains of dead animals and plants.

Geothermal Energy – Heat that has been extracted from the earth for energy use.

Global Warming – The process by which the earth's temperature gradually rises in conjunction with increased greenhouse gases.

Greenhouse Effect – A rise in earth's temperature through the trapping of the sun's energy by gases such as carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide, as well water vapor.

Heat Island Effect – Refers to surface temperatures in urban areas being higher than in rural areas due to lack of vegetation and shade, reduced air flow from tall buildings, and heat from air pollution (factories, vehicles, etc.).

Hybrid Vehicle – A car or bus that uses more than one energy source to operate, such as a conventional propulsion system and a RESS (Rechargeable Energy Storage System).

LEED – Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification started by the U.S. Green Building Council.

Photovoltaics (PVs) – Technology used to convert sunlight into energy (i.e. electricity).

Pre-Consumer Waste – Unused materials in the manufacturing process used to make a new product (i.e., cloth trimmings from a dress used to make a patchwork quilt).

Post-Consumer Waste – The end of a product's life cycle after having been used for its intended purpose.

Recycle – To reuse or reprocess materials.

Red Tide – Green algae blooms (i.e., dinoflagellates) that emit a red-colored toxin that kills marine life and are poisonous to humans eating infected fish.

Remediation – Removal of environmental contaminants.

Renewable Energy – Readily available natural energy sources (such as wind, sun, and water).

Single Stream Recycling (Commingled Recycling) – A recycling process whereby all paper and containers can be collected and processed together, instead of separating items (i.e. aluminum cans, newspapers, plastic, glass, and cardboard) into categories.

Surface Runoff – Flow of water over land (vs. filtering through soil) that potentially carries pollutants (such as insecticides and fertilizers).

Sustainability – The ability to maintain a state of being (i.e., a balanced eco-system).

Transpiration – Process of water ascending from plant roots through its vascular system into the atmosphere.

VOCs – Volatile organic compounds that are carbon based and can contribute to soil, water, and air pollution if released into the atmosphere.

Danielle Hope Hier is the Special Projects Manager for Positive Change Media and Senior Coordinator for Efest Florida. She also owns Birdland Yoga LLC (the "Have Mat, Will Travel" private and semi-private Vinyasa/Hatha-based instruction), is a backup singer at the Center for Positive Living, and is pursuing a master's degree in Mental Health Counseling. Visit www.birdlandyoga.com or www.efest.us.

