Sustainability Terminology Reference Guide

KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COMMON WORDS

When it comes to the subject of sustainability, many commonly used terms are easily confused. Our sustainability experts have compiled this quick reference guide to clarify several words that are used—and misused—in everyday conversations.

SUSTAINABILITY VS. **CSR**

Sustainability is a holistic approach encompassing financial, social and environmental dimensions. Only when all aspects are considered together can we find lasting prosperity in a world of finite resources.



CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) is a framework or strategy used by companies to make and measure progress in becoming more sustainable. A complete CSR plan addresses all three areas of sustainability.

ZERO EMISSIONS VS. **NET ZERO EMISSIONS**

Zero Emissions is sometimes used to describe a process or a machine that supposedly does not create greenhouse gases (zero emission engine). While it may be true that an electric car does not emit exhaust gasses, somewhere along the lifecycle of this machine and its power there were or will be emissions of greenhouse gasses, so the concept of 'zero emissions' is misleading. We should rather use the concept of 'net zero emissions'.

Net Zero Emissions means that any greenhouse gasses that are created by an action, a machine or a process are accurately calculated and then are compensated through human action, such as planting trees. Compensation requires either capturing or avoiding the emission of the same amount of greenhouse gasses that the original action created. By doing this, and only at the specific perimeter considered, we reach what is called Carbon Neutrality.

BIO-BASED (OR BIO-SOURCED) VS. RENEWABLE VS. SUSTAINABLE

Bio-based (or bio-sourced) materials come from biomass, i.e., crops, wood, algae or animals. All bio-based materials are renewable; however, not all bio-based materials are plant-based, and not all bio-based materials degrade.

Renewable means capable of being replenished in a short time period. The word can be used to describe both materials and energy. Renewable energy sources include sun, wind and waves. Renewable materials include some bio-based materials.

Sustainable (or sustainably sourced) materials provide environmental, social and economic benefits. All these aspects are factored in the supplier's choice. Not all bio-based materials can be considered sustainable.



BIO-BASED VS. BIODEGRADABLE

Bio-based refers to where the raw materials originate. Some, but not all, bio-based materials will biodegrade.

Biodegradable refers to how the finished product will break down after being discarded. (See below for more details.) Some biodegradable materials are not bio-based.

RECYCLED VS. RECYCLABLE COMPATIBLE

Recycled products are made from materials that have been recycled.

Recyclable compatible refers to a component of the product that is not recyclable; however that component does not deter the total product from being recycled.

DEGRADABLE VS. BIODEGRADABLE VS. COMPOSTABLE

Degradable refers to any material that breaks down in one way or another. It can break down into small pieces or other components with UV light or heat. It is a very generic word, with no real significance in terms of sustainability.

Biodegradable specifically refers to any material that can be broken down into carbon dioxide, water and biomass by microorganisms or other living things. However, anything can be broken down given enough time. That's why claims should include the timeframe and conditions of biodegradability (in soil, in water or in marine environment for example). The term does not indicate whether or not the end materials are biological or helpful to the environment.

Compostable specifically refers to organic materials that break down within a certain timeframe into small pieces are biodegradable and have no adverse effect on soil health. All compostable items are biodegradable; however, not all biodegradable items are fit for composting.

RAW MATERIALS VS. RESOURCES

Raw materials are the ingredients that make up or are used to produce the final product.	**Resources** include raw materials, plus energy sources, water and air that are used or affected by production of the final product.

To learn more about these terms and how they impact you, **contact a Bostik expert today**!



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