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## Definitions for Green Purchasing Terms

There are many terms that are associated with green purchasing that can be confusing. Here are some frequently used terms associated with Green Purchasing and their definitions.

**"closed-loop recycling"** - A system in which materials are continually recycled into the same product. Examples include aluminum cans and glass bottles. The term is used to describe the last, and most important, step in the recycling process. It refers to the point when a consumer buys a recycled product after it has been put into a recycling program and reprocessed into a new item. (See "recycling symbol")

**non-renewable resource** - A resource that is NOT capable of being naturally restored or replenished; a resource that is exhausted because it has not been replaced (e.g. copper) or because it is used faster than it can be replaced (e.g. oil, coal [what we call fossil fuels]). Their use as material and energy sources leads to depletion of the Earth's reserves and are characterized as such as they do not renew in human relevant periods (They are not being replenished or formed at any significant rate on a human time scale).

**post-consumer** - A term used to describe material that is being reused/recycled after it has been in the consumer's hands (e.g., a newspaper going back to the paper mill to be recycled into new recycled content paper products). Material or product used by the consumer for its original purpose and then discarded.

**pre-consumer** - A term used to describe material that is being reused/recycled before it ever goes to market (e.g. paper scraps off of a paper mill floor going back into the next batch of paper). Waste material generated during the manufacturing process.

**recyclable** - A term used to designate that a product or its package can be recycled. This term may be misleading, as there may not be a recycling program that takes the identified material in the consumer's area.

**recycle** - To collect, separate, process and market materials so they can be used again.

**recycled** - A term used to describe material that has been separated from the waste stream, reprocessed into a new product (often taking the place of virgin material), and then bought back by the consumer as new item. Also seen as "made from recycled material." This means that the packaging or the item you are purchasing has recycled material in it. This is a term we do want to see on products and is what we talk about when we say that for recycling to really work, we have to "close the loop" and buy recycled (recycled content products). Otherwise, we are just sorting our garbage. You will also want to learn about the amount of pre-consumer and post-consumer material used in recycled items (see definitions above). It is preferable to have as high a post-consumer content as possible as this reinforces the recycling loop being closed and indicates that our recycling efforts are paying off.

**recycled content** - The amount of pre- and post-consumer recovered material introduced as a feed stock in a material production process, usually expressed as a percentage (e.g., 30% post-consumer content). The amount of a product's weight or package's weight that is composed of materials that has been recovered from waste.

#### Recycled Content Symbol



**recycle symbol** - The chasing arrow symbol used to show that a product or package may be recycled if there is a program available. On plastics, it is used along with a numbering system (1-7) to help designate plastic resins used in the product. The three arrows on the symbol represent different components of the recycling process.



- The top arrow represents the collection of recyclable materials (e.g. an aluminum can, a piece of white office paper, a plastic #2 milk jug) for processing. The collection can be from a curbside collection or a drop-off site.
- The second arrow (bottom right) represents the recyclables being processed into recycled products (e.g. a new aluminum can from an old aluminum can, notebook paper from white office paper, a park bench from recycled plastic milk jugs).
- The third arrow on the bottom left is the most important arrow. This one represents when the consumer actually buys a product with recycled content. This is the most important step as it closes the recycling loop. Without this last step, we are pretty much just sorting our garbage.

**recycling** - Term used to describe a series of activities that includes collecting recyclable materials that would otherwise be considered waste, sorting and processing recyclables into raw materials such as fibers, and manufacturing the raw materials into new products.

**renewable resource** - A resource that is capable of being naturally restored or replenished (e.g. trees).

**reprocessing** - To process again. Re-refining used oil into new oil is a form of reprocessing.

**re-refining** - To refine again. Used oil that is reprocessed into new oil products is considered re-refined.