

Eco Glossary

CARBON-NEUTRAL DESIGN

Buildings are a main contributor to global warming generating 30% of U.S. CO₂ emissions (the most significant greenhouse gas pollutant). Minimizing energy use that requires the burning of fuels for power generation which causes CO₂ emissions can go a long way to reducing global warming. It is improbable that one can design a project with zero carbon emissions, but it is possible that once the energy footprint is dramatically reduced, the remaining emissions can be offset through outside sources, essentially creating carbon-neutral site. There are many carbon calculators available on-line to estimate the carbon released for single person or family, but it is recommended to hire an energy consultant to determine an accurate amount of carbon emissions for a large-scale project.

ENERGY STAR

An energy-efficiency rating system sponsored by the Environmental Protection Agency. A high Energy Star rating means that the product is designed to minimize its energy consumption. www.energy star.gov

FOREST STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL (FSC)

A third-party certification for wood, wood products and forests. The FSC tracks the wood from its forest of origin all the way through the chain of custody to where the product is sold. An FSC certified product has been harvested and produced in a stringently eco-sensitive manner. www.fsc.org

GREEN

A practice that works with nature instead of against it.

LEADERSHIP IN ENERGY & ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN (LEED)

Developed and administered by the U.S. Green Building Council, the LEED rating system is the most widely known and accepted green building certification program. www.usgbc.org/leed

LIFE CYCLE ANALYSIS

The process of tracing a product, material or practice from its origin through its final disposal or reuse, from factory to landfill or recycling plant. Looking at the whole picture is a tenet of green philosophy.

OFF-GASSING

Many of those "new house" smells are actually hazardous to our health. The emissions from building materials and other products in the home accumulate in the bloodstream and have been linked to increasing rates of asthma and some cancers, particularly in children. The best way to avoid off-gassing is to look for natural products that don't contain toxins such as formaldehyde.

RECYCLED CONTENT

The amount of recycled (reused) material in a given product. Post-industrial recycled content refers to the use of scraps from industrial manufacturing. Post-consumer content is the reuse of products that consumers have used and thrown away.

SOLAR ENERGY

Energy derived from the sun. The solar panels that most of us associate with solar energy are called photovoltaic panels; they transform the sun's rays into usable electricity. Solar thermal processes can be used to heat our hot water.

SUSTAINABLE

meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

VOLATILE ORGANIC COMPOUND (VOC)

The toxic or noxious chemicals that are found in or released from paints, stains, adhesives and sealants. Whenever possible, look for products labeled as having Low, No or Zero VOCs.