

# Glossary

Discussions about plastics and recycling can be filled with industry acronyms and technical language. Below you'll find a list of commonly used terms and their definitions to aid your understanding.



## Advanced recycling

Any process by which plastic is chemically changed into its building blocks to produce new plastics, chemicals, and/or other products. Also known as chemical recycling.

## Biobased

Materials derived from plants and other organisms. Biobased plastics are not necessarily biodegradable. For example, polyethylene made from plants retains the basic properties of polyethylene made from other sources of hydrocarbons.

## Biodegradable

The ability of a material to undergo a chemical process where microorganisms in the environment convert it into natural substances such as water, carbon dioxide, and compost. Biodegradable plastics are not necessarily biobased. Biodegradable plastics can be made from traditional or plant-based sources.

## Circular economy

An economic system based on designing the entire lifecycle of products and conserving product resources so they can be reused or recycled in a way that significantly reduces waste and pollution.

## Circularity

The idea that things like plastic should be used, and then reused in another form. This way it has a cyclical life, greatly reducing the likelihood that it will become waste or enter the environment.

## Compostable

A product capable of degrading into natural elements in a compost environment, leaving no toxicity in the soil.

## Feedstock

Any raw material that can be used to supply or fuel an industrial process or a machine.

## Flexible plastic packaging (FPP)

Any package or part of a package whose shape can be readily changed. Flexible packaging includes, but is not limited to, bags, pouches, liners, and wraps that utilize plastic or film.

## Informal recycling sector

Typically refers to recycling efforts by an individual or group of individuals done outside a formal municipal recycling system; this is common in many developing countries.

## Materials Recovery for the Future (MRFF)

A program formed in 2015 by a coalition of recycling advocates to examine how existing recycling processes could be utilized to capture flexible plastic packaging (FPP).

## Mechanical recycling

A process by which waste materials are turned into raw materials without changing the basic structure of the material.

## Microplastic

Microplastics and microfibers are terms used to describe small pieces of plastic in the environment generally smaller than the size of a sesame seed.

## Plastics value chain

The process or activities of adding value to plastic, including everything from production and marketing to reuse and recycling.

## Recycled plastic feedstock

Materials made from recycled plastics that can be used to supply or fuel an industrial process or a machine.

## Recycling

The process of converting waste materials into new materials and objects.

## Resin

An organic substance, sometimes plant-based but generally synthetic, which is used as a base material for the manufacture of some plastics.

## rFlex

A material primarily consisting of plastic materials like shopping bags, storage bags, and shrink wrap, along with multilayered packaging and fiber materials. It can be used to make lumber, pallets, and more.

## rPET

rPET stands for recycled polyethylene terephthalate, or recycled PET. PET is a strong, durable, and recyclable material that is used for soda bottles, water bottles, and food jars, while rPET can be made into such products as blankets, insulation, car parts, shoes, and more.

## Single-use plastic

Any plastic that is only used once and not returned to the value chain.

## Upcycling

The process of transforming by-products, waste materials, and useless or unwanted products into useful materials or products so they don't end up as waste. Also known as creative reuse.

## Virgin plastic

Any plastic which has never been used or processed before and has no recycled content.

## Waste pickers

An individual or group of individuals that collects recyclable materials as part of the "informal recycling sector," typically done in the absence of effective formal recycling systems in developing countries.