

Glossary of Environmental Terms related to Green Building and Manufacturing

bio-based products—Products that use biological, agricultural or renewable materials such as wood, soy, wheat, bamboo, biodiesel, etc.

certified wood – Wood originating from forests with audited and certified sustainable forestry practices such as protecting trees for future needs as well as wildlife habitat, streams and soil.

chain of custody – The process or actual document tracking a wood product from the forest through processing and manufacture to a vendor or consumer, verifying that the wood is from a certified forest.

cradle to cradle—Refers to the closed loop cycle of products that have a perpetual life through their ability to be completely recycled or decomposed without environmental degradation at the end of their initial use life.

cradle to grave –Refers to the life cycle of a product – the materials, energy and environmental impact involved -- from its beginnings (extraction) through the end of its usefulness (disposal). Sometimes applied specifically to hazardous waste.

Energy Conservation Measures (ECMs) – Installation or modification of equipment or systems for the purpose of reducing energy use and/or costs. (LEED definition)

green building—The use of integrated design strategies, environmentally friendly products and practices in building construction (includes demolition and waste management, remodeling and repair), to minimize environmental impact.

greenwashing – The act of overstating one’s commitment to environmental activity or making misleading claims about the environmental aspects of products, services or technology to garner good publicity.

indoor air quality/indoor environmental quality – Refers to the quality of indoor air for occupants as influenced by the exchange rate of fresh air, off-gassing of interior products, efficiency and design of HVAC systems.

life cycle assessment—An objective process of determining the impact of a product or activity on the environment through analyzing the entire cycle of a product, technology, service, etc. For products, it would include extraction, manufacture, transportation, installation, maintenance, use and ultimate disposal or recycle.

net zero – The concept or goal of to have a carbon neutral building—one with a net energy consumption of zero—producing no carbon dioxide emissions and thus no

negative impact on the environment. The “2030 Challenge” calls for all buildings to be carbon neutral by the year 2030.

post-consumer recycled content —Use of materials discarded by households, commercial or industrial facilities, and thereby diverted from the waste stream.

pre-consumer recycled content —Use of materials that have been diverted from the waste stream during the manufacturing process.

rapidly renewable materials – Materials that replenish themselves ahead of the extraction demand, usually considered to have a shorter than 10-year cycle.

regionally extracted or manufactured materials – Terms used by the LEED rating system to reference materials sourced from within 500 miles of a project site (thereby reducing environmental impact from transportation of materials).

sick building syndrome –When indoor air quality is compromised because of inadequate ventilation or because of chemical or biological contaminants. Building occupants experience negative health or comfort effects.

sustainability – Meeting the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. (Definition from the Bruntland Commission Report, UN, 1987.)

sustainable design – An integrated, whole building design approach that reduces negative impact on the environment. It strives to use resources wisely and minimize waste while improving the indoor air quality for the comfort and health of building occupants.

sustainable forestry – Managing forest resources in ways that meet the long-term forest product needs of the human community while preserving the biodiversity of natural ecosystems.

volatile organic compounds (VOCs) –Carbon compounds emitted as gases from some solids or liquids, containing chemicals with adverse health effects. Concentrations are up to ten times higher indoors than outdoors.