

PLAIN ENGLISH: ENVIRONMENTAL TERMS

More and more we hear and see terms such as 'BER', 'Carbon Count', 'Fuel Poverty' and 'WEEE'. Do you know what they mean? These are just some of the new environmental terms that we see around us and that we need to know.

We are all responsible for protecting the environment for future generations. We are also responsible for communicating as clearly as possible in plain English. Plain English is a style of presenting information that helps someone understand and act on it the first time they read or hear it. Clear information can save time, money and sometimes lives.

['From Air quality to Zero Emissions'](#) is a guide that explains common environmental terms in plain English. It was developed by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and the Department of the Environment. It will help you understand more about the words and concepts used every day when talking about the environment. This in turn will help you make more informed choices. The guide explains environmental ideas and concepts rather than giving you legal definitions.

Sample environmental terms explained in plain English include:



BER

Short for Building Energy Rating. This calculates how much energy a home needs for heating, lighting and hot water. Homes are placed on a scale from A to G. A-rated homes need the least amount of energy while G-rated need the most. Since 1 January 2009, all homes being sold or rented must have a BER certificate. BER ratings are carried out by BER Assessors registered with Sustainable Energy Ireland.



Carbon count

Carbon dioxide is produced as a byproduct when we use energy, for example for electrical appliances and lighting. A carbon count measures how much carbon dioxide we produce through our lifestyle every day.



Fuel poverty

This is when someone is:

- ❖ unable to heat their home to a safe and comfortable level because of low household income
- ❖ has to spend more than 10% of household income to heat a home to a comfortable level because the home is not energy efficient.



Hazardous waste

Waste that is dangerous to human health or the environment and needs to be handled and disposed of carefully. Examples include:

- oil-based paints
- car batteries
- weed killers
- bleach
- waste electrical and electronic devices



WEEE

Short for Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE). These are any unwanted devices with a plug or battery - from a remote control or digital camera to a vacuum cleaner or fridge freezer. These devices must be disposed of carefully to avoid damage to the environment. To get rid of an unwanted device, you can bring it to a civic amenity site or leave it with a retailer when you are buying a new device. All WEEE left in retail outlets and civic amenity sites are collected for recycling.

Understanding these and the other terms in NALA's 'A-Z Guide to Environmental terms' will help you better understand and talk about important environmental issues.

Plain English support

NALA provide an editing and review service of documents that can make your documents easy to understand. They also offer plain English training so that you can create more reader-friendly information.

Contact plainenglish@nala.ie or call Claire O'Riordan at (01) 412 7922.