
Professional Certificate in Environmental Journalism

Pollution Reporting

Air Pollution: The presence of harmful substances in the air, such as chemicals, particulate matter, or gases, that can have negative effects on human health, the environment, and climate change. Related terms include particulate matter, ground-level ozone, and greenhouse gases.

Brownfields: Abandoned or underused industrial and commercial properties where redevelopment or reuse may be complicated by the presence of hazardous substances, pollutants, or other environmental contamination.

Carbon Footprint: The total amount of greenhouse gases produced to directly and indirectly support human activities, usually expressed in equivalent tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂). Related terms include greenhouse gases and climate change.

Climate Change: A long-term change in the average weather patterns that have come to define Earth's local and regional climates. Climate change is primarily caused by human activities that release greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, leading to rising global temperatures.

Contaminated Sites: Locations where the soil, water, or air contains hazardous substances, pollutants, or other environmental contaminants above acceptable levels, posing a risk to human health and the environment.

E-Waste: Electronic waste, including discarded computers, phones, and other electronic devices, that can release toxic substances, such as lead, mercury, and cadmium, into the environment if not properly managed.

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS): A document required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) that provides a detailed analysis of the potential environmental impacts of a proposed federal action or project, as well as alternatives and mitigation measures.

Environmental Justice: The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, in the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

Greenhouse Gases: Gases in Earth's atmosphere that trap heat from the sun, leading to a warming effect on the planet. The primary greenhouse gases are carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), and fluorinated gases.

Hazardous Waste: Waste that poses a substantial danger to public health or the environment and requires special handling, treatment, and disposal. Examples include industrial waste, medical waste, and household hazardous waste.

Industrial Symbiosis: A collaborative approach to waste management and resource utilization in which industrial facilities work together to reduce waste, conserve resources, and improve environmental performance.

Landfills: Sites designed for the disposal of solid waste, typically consisting of a lined hole in the ground where waste is compacted and covered with soil. Modern landfills are designed to minimize environmental impacts, including groundwater contamination and greenhouse gas emissions.

Life-Cycle Assessment (LCA): An analytical tool used to evaluate the environmental impacts of a product, process, or service throughout its entire life cycle, from raw material extraction to end-of-life disposal.

Nonpoint Source Pollution: Pollution that comes from many diffuse sources, such as agricultural runoff, urban runoff, and atmospheric deposition, and is not easily traced to a specific source.

Particulate Matter: Tiny particles of solid or liquid matter suspended in the air, which can have negative effects on human health and the environment. Particulate matter is a component of air pollution and is classified by size, with smaller particles (PM2.5 And PM10) being more harmful.

Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT) Programs: Programs that charge residents for solid waste disposal based on the amount of waste they generate, encouraging waste reduction, reuse, and recycling.

Pollution Prevention (P2): A proactive approach to reducing or eliminating the creation of pollutants and waste at the source, rather than managing or treating pollution after it has been created.

Recycling: The process of collecting, processing, and converting waste materials into new products, reducing the need for raw materials and the environmental impacts associated with their extraction and production.

Renewable Energy: Energy generated from resources that are naturally replenished, such as wind, solar, geothermal, hydro, and biomass.

Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasure (SPCC) Plan: A plan required by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for facilities that store, handle, and transport oil or oil products, to prevent, prepare for, and respond to oil spills.

Superfund: A federal program established by the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) to clean up the nation's most hazardous waste sites and hold responsible parties accountable for the costs of cleanup.

Sustainability: The practice of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, by balancing economic, social, and environmental objectives.

Toxic Release Inventory (TRI): A publicly available database maintained by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that tracks the release of certain toxic chemicals into the environment by industrial facilities.

Urban Runoff: Stormwater that flows over streets, parking lots, and other urban surfaces, picking up

pollutants and depositing them into nearby water bodies.

Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs): A group of chemicals that easily evaporate at room temperature and contribute to the formation of ground-level ozone and other air pollutants. VOCs are found in a wide range of products, including paints, solvents, cleaners, and personal care products.

Water Pollution: The presence of harmful substances, such as chemicals, pathogens, or nutrients, in water that can have negative effects on human health, aquatic ecosystems, and the environment. Related terms include point source pollution and nonpoint source pollution.

Zero Waste: A philosophy and goal that aims to eliminate waste and maximize resource efficiency by reducing, reusing, recycling, and composting materials, as well as changing production and consumption patterns.