

AGTA Calls for Ban on Term ‘Recycled’



The [American Gem Trade Association](#) (AGTA) has urged the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to outlaw the terms “recycled” and “mining-free” in recommendations it has submitted for the “Green Guides.”

The guidelines govern eco-friendly advertising claims and terminology. The FTC is undergoing a statutory review and has requested public comment on proposed changes.

The AGTA committee was announced in January during [AGTA GemFair Tucson](#). Committee members say its goal is to standardize terms surrounding sustainability and ethics. Developing recommendations for proposed revisions to the Green Guides was among its first tasks.

“The Green Guides aren’t specific to jewelry, so we need to be realistic that many of the things we noted may not apply to other industries and may be most appropriate to address in the FTC’s Jewelry Guides revisions,” said committee member Jenna White,

researcher, and PhD student in Earth Resources Science & Engineering at the Colorado School of Mines. White was recently hired as a consultant to AGTA.

Recommendations to the FTC include the following:

- Use the generally accepted definition of “sustainable” as developed by the United Nations’ Brundtland Commission in 1987: “Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”
- Define the terms “ethical,” “responsible,” and “conflict-free” for the benefit of the consumer and for the [integrity of the supply chain](#).
- Issue guidance to prevent companies from making unsubstantiated environmental claims.
- Ban the use of the term “recycled” from being applied to all gem materials as well as gold, platinum, palladium, and silver, and outline the use of the term “recovered from electronic or e-waste” for recovered metals exclusively.
- Do not permit the use of the terms “never-mined” or “mining-free” regarding gemstones and precious metals.
- Use the term “carbon-neutral” with substantiation and do not permit the use of “carbon free,” as the former more accurately reflects the carbon offsets being used by some companies.

“This is the first time that gem dealers have sat down and worked together to produce guidelines like this,” said committee member Jaimeen Shah of Prima Gems USA. “It was the industry representing itself to create pure cohesive recommendations — which were produced with about 12 contemporary terms definitions in mind. The committee will unveil these after the Las Vegas shows.”

Committee members said they issued these recommendations based on of “a lack of existing legal definitions, which has created an environment [ripe for greenwashing](#).” The overuse of terms such as “ethical” and “responsible” often “intentionally connote both environmental and social benefits without providing any specifics,” they explained.

“The committee was all in agreement to define terms like ‘sustainability’ and ‘ethics,’” said committee member John Bradshaw, a gemstone cutter and gemologist. “Who defines what these are right now? I have a friend who exhibited at a trade show in Canada, and another exhibitor had the words ‘ethical’ and ‘certified dealer’ plastered all over his booth. Who is certifying anything or anyone?”

The term “recycled” is problematic because it is being used to describe previously owned or estate gems that are being reused, the committee argued.

“There is no evidence that diamonds or colored stones are being thrown into landfills in an amount that is meaningful,” it wrote. “There is no evidence that colored stones result in environmental damage when landfilled.”

The term “recycled” as it pertains to noble metals is leading to “instances of ‘upcharging’ consumers” for gold already in the supply chain without any additional environmental benefit, the committee added. “The core issue is that recycled gold is not traceable,” it continued

The committee also wishes to [define “sustainable”](#) to include non-renewable materials

such as colored gems, diamonds and precious metals.

“The word ‘sustainable’ is a buzzword that gets used in the wrong way,” Bradshaw said. “Plus, the FTC doesn’t list any time frame for anything to be sustainable. People can also bend definitions to try to make their actions appear greener than they really are.”

The committee also wants to redefine the terms [“locally sourced”](#) and “certificates.” The first, its members said, “implies a lower carbon footprint but does not guarantee that gemstones have not left the US for cutting or processing,” while the latter is a word wrongly used by many in the industry to refer to lab reports. Gemstone reports from labs — often a mix of gemstone facts and lab opinions — are sometimes mistakenly called certificates, it pointed out.

Image: A woman holding diamond jewelry. (Shutterstock)