

THE CARBON CYCLE

The carbon cycle is the natural way carbon moves through the Earth's atmosphere, living things, oceans, and geologic formations.

1 PHOTOSYNTHESIS

Plants absorb carbon dioxide (CO_2) from the atmosphere and use sunlight to convert it into organic matter.

2 RESPIRATION

Plants, animals, and microorganisms release carbon dioxide (CO_2) back into the atmosphere during respiration.

3 DECOMPOSITION

When organisms die, decomposers break down the remains, returning carbon to the soil and atmosphere.

4 OCEAN ABSORPTION

Oceans absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Marine organisms use carbon to build shells and skeletons.

5 FOSSILIZATION

Over long periods, carbon can be buried and transformed into fossil fuels like coal, oil, and natural gas.

ATMOSPHERIC
CARBON
 CO_2

CARBON
STORED IN
PLANTS &
SOIL

CARBON
STORED IN
SOIL &
SEDIMENTS