

Environmental Priority: WASTE



Illinois generates over 19 million tons of garbage a year, which is 23% more waste per capita than the average state in the United States. Sadly, only 37% of this waste material is ever recycled. Additionally, even though estimates of Illinois' waste stream indicate that nearly 20% is organic of which 23% is food scrap, only 13% and 1% of these materials, respectively, is diverted from landfills and composted. There are 42 landfills in Illinois, with a statewide average life expectancy of 21 years, and those in the Chicago area expected to last only another 11 years.

PRIORITY #1: EDUCATION

Currently, many recycling and composting education programs are done at the county level. Many curbside recycling programs are over two decades old and require review, including reconsideration of educational programs and the effectiveness of a statewide program. In January of 2018, passed the National Sword policy banning plastic waste importation and other materials because of the high contamination rate of U.S. recycling. Effective composting and recycling programs require robust education programs in order to succeed and reduce contamination.

Policy Need: Creation of a strong, statewide program dedicated to educating consumers about recycling contamination and how to prevent it.

PRIORITY #2: PLANNING

In 1986, the Solid Waste Management Fund established the first state goal for reducing landfill use. Passed in 1988, the Solid Waste Planning and Recycling Act encourages long-range waste planning. These laws ban tires, used oil, white goods (like refrigerators and A/C units), landscape waste, electronics, as well as partially banning asphalt roofing shingles, from landfills. The state goal for each county is to recycle 25% of recyclable materials.

While yard waste is banned from landfills, there are few opportunities to compost other organic material, like food scraps, which are estimated to account for nearly 20% of Illinois' waste stream. This is in part due to the siting permit for commercial food scrap composting being prohibitively expensive for small business owners until the General Assembly recently reduced the cost. Since then a dozen sites began accepting food scraps. In total, 24 communities implemented residential municipal composting pick-up and strong state goals could increase this number.

Priority Need: State facilities should lead the way on recycling, composting, waste reduction, and diversion, and coordinate increased purchasing of Illinois-manufactured, post-consumer recycled products or end use compost for state projects.

Priority Need: Illinois' recycling planning mechanism, with county by county support, should be updated in favor of a statewide plan that includes waste reduction, recycling, and composting.

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PRIORITY #3: MARKET AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

According to a 2014 report by DCEO, Illinois already has over 110,000 waste diversion jobs with a payroll of \$3.6 billion. Furthermore, manufacturing with recycled commodities in Illinois reduces greenhouse gas emissions by 4 million tons (carbon equivalent) a year. Composting can create up to 4 times as many jobs as landfills.

The Rauner administration closed the DCEO recycling and composting grant program, which is funded through already-existing funds from the Solid Waste Management Fund. This grant program was critical to supporting recycling and composting infrastructure and should be re-established within the IEPA recycling program. While we recommend that DCEO retain recycling as an area of economic study and promotion, a streamlined program at IEPA with the associated recycling and composting grant program will boost this important industry.

Priority Need: Reestablish DCEO recycling and composting grant program at IEPA.

PRIORITY #4: REDUCING WASTE

The easiest waste to divert is waste that is never created, but it's not enough for individuals to be the only ones responsible for reducing waste by reducing consumption. Companies should be required to make reducing waste and recycling of their products as easy as possible.

For example, Illinois has few laws that require manufacturers to recycle hard-to-recycle waste products, such as electronic waste and mercury thermostats. The electronic waste law has been improved and consumers should see the impact in 2019. Mercury thermostat manufacturers have been working to reduce or eliminate their recycling goals altogether. Other states have extended producer responsibility to mattresses, carpets, and more.

Plastic waste from single use plastics has become an increasing problem in our waterways and a threat to public health. About 22 million pounds of plastic flow into the Great Lakes each year alone. Illinois was the first state in the nation to pass a plastic microbead ban in 2016, and should continue to be on the front edge of the fight against plastic pollution. Efforts to pass a statewide plastic bag fee are ongoing and a priority. A container deposit bill could also help reduce our plastic pollution. Michigan, for example, has a successful program where over 90% of the covered containers are redeemed.

Food waste accounts for 14.9% of the national waste stream, the volume of which amounts to \$165 billion each year in wasted food, while 1 in 8 Illinoisans are food insecure according to the Illinois EPA. Food waste recovery must be pursued in order to increase diversion from landfills, reduce hunger, and prevent wasted economic productivity. Clarifying liability protections as well as bridging connections between business and institutions that serve communities in need will allow Illinois to recover greater food waste.

Priority Need: Pass legislation that extends product responsibility to businesses to reduce waste, and recycle their products and/or provides appropriate consumer disincentives as use.