

Waste is a major problem globally and in Illinois. Nineteen million tons of waste are landfilled in Illinois every year, contributing to GHG emissions, squandering valuable non-renewable, natural, and other resources, and inequitably impacting our neighbors. As materials continue to be landfilled and littered, low-income, BIPOC, and rural communities across the State bear the health, economic, and environmental consequences. In early 2024, Illinois became the eighth-largest landfill methane emitter in the country, moving up - in the wrong direction - from the ninth position. Plastic production is also moving in the wrong direction, especially considering plastics break up but not down; only 9% of plastic produced globally is recycled, and plastic pollution, microplastics, and nanoplastics persist in our bodies and our natural environment for millennia. In June 2024, the Illinois EPA set statewide landfill diversion goals of 40% by 2025, 45% by 2030, and 50% by 2035. Given Illinois' midwest location and its history and future of manufacturing, industry, and innovation, the need and pressure will only increase to pass and implement bold yet common-sense legislation and other policies to encourage source reduction and zero waste.

PRIORITY ONE

Source Reduction, Reuse, and Refill

The easiest way to reduce waste is not to create it in the first place. Source reduction includes practices for the design, manufacture, use, and disposal of products that eliminate waste and pollution before they are created - by using less material to get the job done - and reduce the volume, mass, and toxicity of products throughout their life cycle while extending that life cycle. Source reduction reduces energy consumption and pollution, conserves natural resources, extends landfill space, and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. It can also take many forms, including reusing or donating items, buying in bulk, reducing packaging, redesigning products and manufacturing processes, and reducing toxicity. Creating less waste and pollution positively impacts human health and the environment and is often less expensive for facilities than to pay for control, treatment, and disposal of waste.

While it's important to recycle correctly and increase and improve infrastructure, more recycling will not solve plastic pollution or our overconsumption and waste problems. Reducing and reusing are much more important than recycling for human health and the environment. But, a decades-long focus on recycling and diversion from landfills has turned attention away from source reduction and reuse that would result in far less waste to manage in the first place. Source reduction is fundamentally different and more desirable than waste management and pollution control and we need to address this historical lack of attention to source reduction. Reuse and refill systems ultimately decrease the use of virgin materials, retain packaging and create value in the economy, divert packaging and other waste from landfills and incineration, and reduce pollution and methane emissions.

POLICY NEED

We need to shift away from a 'take-make-waste' model of production and disposal and toward a circular and reuse economy that prioritizes the well-being of people and the planet and manages resources to preserve value. Reduction and reuse should be the state's disposal goals. Products must be designed for durability, longevity, and reparability rather than planned obsolescence. Right-to-repair laws will ensure products are fixed more and wasted less. Reuse and refill systems must be recognized as sound economic, workforce, and business practices, environmental justice solutions, and climate change mitigators. Incentivize producers to shift to reusable products and packaging.



PRIORITY TWO

Organics, Compost, and Landfill Methane Emissions

Food waste accounted for 21.6% of the national waste stream in 2018, which amounts to more than \$200 billion each year in wasted food, while 1 in 9 Illinoisans, including children, are food insecure, according to the Illinois EPA. Food waste reduction and edible food recovery must be pursued to increase diversion from landfills, reduce hunger, and prevent wasted economic productivity. Clarifying liability protections and bridging connections between businesses and institutions that serve communities in need will allow Illinois to recover greater amounts of food that currently is either lost (produced but not consumed) or wasted (purchased but not consumed).

While yard waste has been banned from Illinois landfills since 1990, there is no such ban on other organics, including food scraps, going to landfill. Like the national waste stream, food scraps account for up to 20% of Illinois' waste stream while producing methane emissions. As organic waste decomposes in landfills, it generates methane, a super potent greenhouse gas with about 80 times the warming power of carbon dioxide, over a 20-year time horizon. There need to be more opportunities to compost other organic material, like food scraps, and incentives to increase compost use generally. Requirements to use finished compost in landscape and other projects specifically will improve and increase composting infrastructure and markets throughout the state. While more than 70 Illinois communities have implemented some form of residential municipal composting pick-up and/or drop-off programs, strong state goals, incentives, and requirements would increase the number of compost facilities and decrease methane emissions even further.

POLICY NEED

State, county, and municipal agencies should lead the way in implementing food waste reduction, recycling, composting, and diversion policies and be required to use finished compost for state landscape and other projects. Onerous siting and permitting requirements that create barriers to entry need to be streamlined, and composting infrastructure needs to increase throughout the state, including smaller, decentralized, and equitably distributed options for rural, environmental justice, and/or low-income communities. IEPA and DCEO recycling and composting grant programs should be re-established, and food donation and rescue need to be emphasized and incentivized.

PRIORITY THREE

Single-use Plastics, Microplastics, and Nanoplastics

The way we produce, use, and dispose of plastics is polluting ecosystems, creating risks for human and animal health, and destabilizing the climate. Plastic production has approximately doubled over the last 20 years and could double again over the next 20 years. Evidence of this increased production can be found everywhere. About 22 million pounds of plastic annually enter our Great Lakes, which provide drinking water for more than 40 million people. More than 11 million pounds (equal to 100 Olympic-sized pools of plastic bottles) of that ends up in Lake Michigan alone. A Spring 2024 Report found that 86% of litter collected on Great Lakes beaches is composed either partially or fully of plastic, including primarily single-use items like bags, straws, wrappers, takeout containers, and utensils that break up into smaller pieces called microplastics (defined as less than 5mm long). Microplastics are likely to degrade further into smaller nanoplastics, which cannot be seen by the human eye.

Plastic production is expected to increase by at least thirty percent by 2040 and result in a projected four-fold increase in plastic pollution in our waterways by 2050. With 25-40% of plastic production going to make packaging and at least half of that going to single-use, the risks of pollution to natural ecosystems, human health, and the climate will only worsen. It's estimated that by 2050, there could be more plastic in the ocean than fish (by weight) unless we change course. Plastics are a different form of fossil fuels and climate mitigation policies must include measures to reduce reliance on plastics, particularly single-use plastics and unnecessary plastic packaging.

POLICY NEED

Rethink how we make, use, reuse, and dispose of plastics. Eliminate the plastics we don't need, innovate to ensure the plastics we do need are reusable or recyclable, and circulate and reuse plastics to keep them in the economy and out of the environment. Implement mandatory measures to reduce plastic production, starting with single-use plastic and polystyrene. Prohibit the production and trade of problematic plastics, such as those that pose health risks, are toxic to produce, and/or are difficult to recycle. Identify and then eliminate toxic chemicals in plastic production and require manufacturers to disclose the chemical content of plastics.

PRIORITY FOUR

Extend Producer Responsibility

It is not enough for individuals to be solely responsible for reducing waste by reducing consumption. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) programs hold producers responsible for the entire life cycle of their product and packaging choices and encourage them to make reducing waste and recycling their products as easy as possible. EPR can include both financial responsibility and operational responsibility, though the amount and type may differ. Organizations and policymakers increasingly point to effective EPR as a necessary component of a comprehensive approach to addressing waste and recycling challenges and concerns over single-use plastic pollution.

Illinois loses economic value and green sector jobs by failing to reuse and recycle packaging and paper products. Establishing post-consumer recycled content requirements for rigid plastics will increase markets for this increasingly common packaging material, reduce demand for natural resources, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. State, county, and municipal facilities should lead the way in coordinating increased purchasing of Illinois-manufactured, post-consumer recycled products. Companies also must adhere to "truth-in-labeling" and "truth-in-recycling" standards regarding recycled content, recyclability, compostability, expiration dates, and more.

POLICY NEED

Put responsibility for managing and educating consumers about packaging and paper waste on those who decide which materials to use in the first place – namely, consumer brands. Create strong financial incentives for brands to use less packaging and paper overall (and to choose more sustainable options) and increase access to recycling and composting infrastructure across the state. Establish convenience standards to ensure collections of food scraps, organics, and other recyclable materials are as convenient as collection of materials that go to landfill. Accomplish all this without increasing consumer prices or incurring costs to local governments.

