

# **Illinois Statewide Recycling Needs Assessment Advisory Council Meeting Minutes**

*Monday, April 13, 2026, 12:00 pm CT*

WebEx Webinar

## **1. Welcome: Roll Call**

- a. Attendees: John Pausma, Tomas Vujovic, Aaron Harmon, Pete Varney, Lisa Disbrow, Nicole Willett, Joshua Connell, Mike DiMucci, Adam Spaulding, Teresa Kernc, Brad Cole, Christina Seibert, Cole Stollard, Alec Laird, Andrea Densham, Seema Keshav, Frank Pettis, Donovan Griffith, Elizabeth Sheaffer, Madeline Norris, Machele Henderson, Carol Patterson, Patricia Bonaguro
- b. Not in attendance: Mark Weintraub, Becky Tracy, Darnell Tingle, Taylor Loeber
- c. A quorum was present.
- d. Illinois EPA staff attending: Vishnu Srinivasaraghavan, Cassandra Clark
- e. Open seats on the Advisory Council include one representative of each: a county with a population of 50,000-1,000,000, a municipality with a population less than 1,000,000, and a retailer.

## **2. Meeting Minutes**

- a. March 9 meeting minutes were reviewed. Motion by Brad Cole, second by Elizabeth Sheaffer; all in favor, minutes were approved.

## **3. Illinois EPA Updates**

- a. Due to a technical issue, the March 9 meeting recording does not have sound and is therefore not available. A note will be added to the website.
- b. Christina Seibert shared that she had requested via email to Illinois EPA and Eunomia that Eunomia's draft report to the Advisory Council address packaging materials only and excludes other waste types or study components that are beyond the scope of the needs assessment statute. Eunomia has indicated they intend to provide the report in that manner, and Illinois EPA will monitor that for the draft also.
- c. The draft report is expected to be reviewed concurrently by Illinois EPA and the Advisory Council based on the current schedule and project status.

## **4. Consideration for Packaging EPR Policy by Material Type**

- a. A presentation from James Bond with support from Abigail Szein, American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA) was provided. The presentation included:
  - i. Introduction to AF&PA and its members and statistics on the forest products industry in the US and in Illinois
  - ii. Overview of the paper and paper packaging manufacturing supply chain

- iii. Estimated recycling rates for paper (60-64%) and cardboard (69-74%) and Illinois access to curbside recycling (88.7% of population and 56% of communities) based on AF&PA 2024 statistics
- iv. AF&PA's goal to ensure fair and equitable treatment for paper and paper products with EPR engagement through legislative advocacy, regulatory implementation, and paper recycling industry excellence
- v. Priority the paper industry places on recycling and investment in the recycling system
- vi. EPR policy challenges for the paper industry include: forced examination of recycling questions they have never answered before, addressed through a design guide determining if paper can be recycled and under what standards, needs assessments and definitions aligning with program policy to provide meaningful data; data quality challenges that impact how programs are implemented; and how fees are to be used; education and behavior change remain key elements to increasing recycling
- vii. EPR programs are useful for products that don't have good end markets, but paper is not one of those; policy should differentiate between products with good end markets and others to not bring harm to established recycling streams
- viii. EPR best practices include: recognizing successes of products like paper to avoid negative impacts to recycling rates; look at early outcomes in states implementing packaging EPR; and investing in recycling education
- ix. Overview of resources for packaging designers to increase paper recyclability
- x. Review of advances in paper recycling with pizza boxes and paper cups as examples

**b. Questions from Advisory Council members clarified elements of the AF&PA presentation:**

- i. Why does EPR policy challenge or burden the paper industry to achieve recyclability? – The industry has established end markets, and the circular value chain is complex with EPR not aligning with it. Funds have had to be reassigned to help members navigate EPR compliance rather than funding consumer education. Fees should be allocated to education in EPR programs.
- ii. Can you explain challenges caused by coatings on paper? – Coatings don't break down like paper fibers do. Recycled products touch a lot of steps (machines and humans) to be recycled, and each need awareness of recyclability and be synchronized to achieve recycling. Coatings can lead to incorrect sorting or difficulty in processing or movement to end markets. The updates to the design guide will give more direction to producers about the impact of coatings. PROs and regulators being part of discussions in addition to MRFs and processors increases complexity of discussions.
- iii. One of the benefits of EPR policy is that producers are challenged to plan for end management of materials that they haven't been responsible for

before. Does AF&PA support removing challenges from consumers to decide whether an item is recyclable, and support MRFs needs to better manage material? – In some instances EPR policy will move cost from one entity to another rather than involving all participants in the process. Paper is a valuable commodity and supports recycling as evidenced by its high collection already, and keeping that in mind in developing policy.

- iv. Does AF&PA have an EPR policy position statement? – No, but there are documents and guidance available to support increasing paper recycling. EPR is not necessarily the best policy to increase paper recycling. AF&PA will share resources.

c. A presentation from Scott DeFife, Glass Packaging Institute (GPI) was provided. The presentation included:

- i. Introduction to GPI and its members, including glass manufacturers and processors, with some brands who use glass packaging beginning to join
- ii. Overview of the glass container recycling loop and current recovery which has been stable around 30% with a goal of 50% recycled by 2030
- iii. Glass is endlessly recyclable, but regional uses, quality, and ease of landfiling make it harder to increase recovery
- iv. Most glass is recycled from states with deposit return systems / bottle bills
- v. End markets are prevalent in the Great Lakes region with glass manufacturers, recycling processors, and fiberglass plants
- vi. EPR policy issues include: poor fit of glass in single-stream recycling; fees based on weight skew impact of materials on the system, so users of glass are over-indexed on fees compared to users of other more problematic materials (e.g., plastic film)
- vii. Recovered glass (what is collected) in Illinois is not as recycled (made into new product) as in other states; use of glass as alternative daily cover at landfills is one reason, which is not considered “recycling” under EPR policy
- viii. Participation in development of industry standards for responsible end markets, post-consumer recycled (PCR) content, and design, plus specific discussions and concerns about small format packages of other material types (plastic, paper, metal) that end up in the glass stream because of MRF sortation processes and
- ix. Visual comparison of glass from bottle bill states compared to MRF streams
- x. Suggestions to not exempt small-format materials that end up as “free-riders” (e.g., prescription bottles) and are captured often in the glass stream
- xi. Review of impact of recycling suitability of glass based on collection method (single-stream / drop-off / separate stream collection / deposit stream)
- xii. Glass container material flow in non-deposit states
- xiii. Differences in glass quality and residue with different MRF systems, including impact of secondary cleaning of glass at MRFs

- xiv. Estimates of annual glass recovery in Illinois; baseline = 149,100 tons /  
EPR = 329,400 tons / EPR + deposit system = 425,200 tons

**d. Questions from Advisory Council members clarified elements of the GPI presentation:**

- i. How much space and investment is needed to clean up glass? – This was looked at in Colorado and can be shared; costs can be \$250,000-\$500,000+ depending on MRF size and equipment can be added at the end of the MRF system. There are a lot of hybrid options to manage glass effectively in existing systems. ROI for glass cleaning equipment is approximately 3 years.
- ii. Can you talk about glass reuse? – Reusable bottles have been produced by GPI members, and all EPR laws have a reuse component. Products in reusable and refillable glass are being considered (e.g., dairy, like Oberweis); to be reusable, infrastructure and weight consideration is needed. (Note: the Advisory Council will have a separate presentation on reuse and refill in the future.)
- iii. Does GPI have a position on how to best direct reuse and refill in EPR legislation or program plans? – Targets depend on infrastructure; a system-wide goal is more achievable than goals for each package type (e.g., spirits and prohibition laws, peanut butter jars).

**5. Questions and Comments from Council Members**

- a. None

**6. Public Comment Period**

- a. Sydney Harris (Upstream) offered support for discussion on reuse at a future meeting and assistance in coordinating that. Targets for reuse are essential to achieve more reuse in an EPR system, but there are many ways to do that that can be discussed.
- b. Walter Willis (Solid Waste Agency of Lake County) commented in response to AF&PA data on paper recovery that Illinois waste characterization data shows paper is a top 6 material in the landfill stream; paper was in the original draft of the packaging EPR bill for this reason and is not as highly recovered as presented.

**7. Next Meeting**

- a. May 11, 12-1:30 pm CT via WebEx

**8. Adjournment**

- a. The meeting adjourned at 1:31 pm CT; motion by John Pausma, second by Brad Cole.