

Illinois Statewide Recycling Needs Assessment Advisory Council Meeting Minutes

Monday, May 11, 2026, 12:00 pm CT

WebEx Webinar

1. Welcome: Roll Call

- a.** Attendees: John Pausma, Aaron Harmon, Pete Varney, Lisa Disbrow, Nicole Willett, Joshua Connell, Mark Weintraub, Mike DiMucci, Adam Spaulding, Teresa Kernc, Brad Cole, Christina Seibert, Cole Stollard, Andrea Densham, Seema Keshav, Frank Pettis, Donovan Griffith, Elizabeth Sheaffer, Madeline Norris, Carol Patterson, Machele Henderson, Patricia Bonaguro
- b.** Not in attendance: Tomas Vujovic, Becky Tracy, Alec Laird, Darnell Tingle, Taylor Loeber
- c.** A quorum was present.
- d.** Illinois EPA staff attending: Vishnu Srinivasaraghavan, Cassandra Clark, Jacki Cooperider, Kyle Rominger
- 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.** April 13 meeting minutes were reviewed. Motion by Brad Cole, second by Adam Spaulding; all in favor, minutes were approved.

3. Illinois EPA Updates

- a.** Illinois EPA is currently reviewing Eunomia's report and developing preliminary comments. Input from today's meeting will also be considered in IEPA's review and revisions from Eunomia may be provided.

4. Consideration for Packaging EPR Policy by Material Type

- a.** A presentation from Jason Pelz with support from Brendon Holland, Carton Council, was provided. The presentation included:
 - i.** Introduction to the Carton Council and its members representing four of the largest food and beverage carton manufacturers in the US and seeking to increase recycling of cartons through work with all parts of the supply chain
 - ii.** Discussion of design, multi-layer composition, and recyclability of cartons generally
 - iii.** Locations of MRFs accepting cartons and end markets processing cartons as a discrete stream in the US; in Illinois Carton Council estimates 78% of households have curbside access to carton recycling and 7 out of 12 MRFs sort cartons either separately (PSI Grade 52) or with mixed paper (PSI Grade 54)

- iv. End markets for cartons, including paper products / tissue (using fiber fraction only) and sustainable building materials (using whole carton; only if Grade 52 carton-only bales)
 - v. Industry collaborations with NGOs and recycling stakeholders to determine whether other materials (cups, poly-coated paper) can be managed together and support state goals and MRF needs
- b. Questions from Advisory Council members clarified elements of the Carton Council presentation:**
- i. What percentage goes as mixed paper and as carton-specific? – 70% is mixed paper going to paper mills, 30% is carton-only going to building products
 - ii. What end market capacity is available? – Cartons are a small percentage of mixed paper and has ample capacity. For whole cartons, there is capacity for about 30,000 tons annually, which will grow as capture grows; there is more capacity today than is being used
 - iii. How much demand is there for the carton building product that is produced? – All product is being purchased, and the California facility that opened recently had a buyer for all of its product before starting operation
 - iv. How would more material be diverted – MRF improvements, drop-offs, etc.? – Sortation investments can work with NIR sortation and AI robotics at MRFs, manual sorting as a QC position can capture cartons, air eject systems are all possibilities at MRFs
 - v. Can mixed paper be used to feed carton-only facilities? – This hasn't worked well because of variability in mixed paper bale compositions and the need to add other materials for a homogeneous end product; cartons are an ideal composition on their own. Carton Council has a design for recyclability guide to ensure carton composition remains consistent to facilitate full-carton recycling
 - vi. MRF operators can sort down to any grade, but it is important to note the balance between cost and effort to sort and produce bales for each discrete material and what producers or end markets want / will accept; this should be kept in mind for the Needs Assessment modeling
 - vii. Many Illinois MRFs are not sorting a Grade 52 bale but instead putting cartons into a Grade 56 mixed paper bale; are these managed the same as a Grade 54 mixed paper bale? – Yes, and polymers are still not captured (added note from MRF operators that there are limited carton bales being produced, with only LRS noting that they produce a carton bale at their newer MRF)
 - viii. Would MRFs create a Grade 52 bale if pricing was published? – MRFs indicated it would be dependent on space for sorting equipment and bunker capacity

5. Eunomia Data Updates

- a. Key findings of the current state conditions and modeling were shared, including:

- i. Recovery rate calculation methodology and findings, including survey data sources, waste characterization data, modeled elements, and sense checking against other datasets
- ii. Residential curbside recycling access varies by region (15% in Region 7 to 97% in Region 2); 82% of statewide population (but about half of municipalities) has access to a drop-off within 15 miles (but much of the geographic area and small municipalities in the state do not have access)
- iii. All materials are below the 65% recovery target currently (cardboard/paper 43%; plastic 9%; glass 24%; metal 22%)
- iv. High MRF acceptance of cardboard and paper, rigid plastics, glass, and metal cans; flexible plastic and other metal packaging are less commonly collected
- v. Over 86% of paper and packaging from covered entities (residential, schools, public spaces, governments) are from residential sources; on average, 1,140 pounds per household per year of covered material is generated
- vi. Estimated 50-60% of municipalities have access to curbside recycling, representing 80-85% of households statewide; 390 municipalities provided survey data (out of 1,294 municipalities total)
- vii. Recovery rates by material and region vary; of note, glass recovery is at 0% for Regions 3-7 because glass to alternate daily cover (ADC) is not counted; more information is being sought to clarify this
- viii. Three different metrics for regional performance: curbside access = 83% (proportion of households with access to curbside recycling); curbside capture rate = 37% (for households with curbside recycling, equals tons collected curbside divided by estimated tons generated by those households); sorted for recycling rate = 32% (covered material sorted by MRFs and from drop-offs divided by tons of all covered material generated)
- ix. Information on which municipalities responded to the survey and how to share that is being discussed with IEPA
- x. Questions from Council members:
 - Was contamination data removed from recycling composition data? – Yes, that is accounted for from the MRF data
 - A list of all 1,294 municipalities with indication of curbside, drop-off and no access is requested
 - Survey responses were only received from 30% of statewide municipalities; was that extrapolated to the state in total, and can the methodology be fully described in the report? – Responses informed this but the same percentages were not used directly; trends in access, household density, distance to facilities, rurality were considered
 - Will the report include more visibility into materials in each broader category? – Yes, that information will be detailed further in the report
 - How many households don't have access to either curbside or drop-off? – This will be provided (roughly estimated at 17-19% verbally)
 - Is there an accepted materials list for each of the MRFs in the state? – Data engagement is restricted because of anonymization and

summarization by Crowe, with data grouped by region; this will be further discussed with IEPA and Crowe; perhaps MRFs will share this data without requiring it to be protected under the NDA in a broader sense?

- Does MRF data exclude any data from outside Illinois? – Yes, data is for Illinois only
- What is the source of data for total material sold in Illinois? – This is a combination of data from MRF quantities and landfill quantities / compositions from waste characterization study to determine quantities generated in Illinois
- Did you map towns with 1,500 or less people and their access to drop-offs? – This will be provided

b. Future state lever recommendations were shared:

- i. Three types of levers can be considered to increase recovery and evaluate cost: access (collection frequency, collection access, accepted materials), configuration (collection method, compliance, education), and infrastructure (technology investments)
- ii. Levers are grouped to near-term (0-5 years) and longer-term (5-10+ years)
 - Near-term improvements that can be established quickly include: expanding access and collection frequency to align with trash service, improved education and marketing, and equipment upgrades to improve recovery of currently collected materials at MRFs and clean up glass
 - Medium/long-term improvements require more time or investment: recycling access to all locations, more recyclables able to be collected, “smart bins” in public spaces, secondary facilities for certain materials, or new sorting facilities and reclaimers
- iii. Questions from Council members:
 - Modeling should be addressing how we can reach 35 / 50 / 65% recycling by 2035, will this be the case? – Yes
 - Do you consider dual-stream to collect more material, and why? – Dual-stream does not imply collecting more material, but it may ensure better sorting and recovery of collected material
 - Is the recycling rate calculated by tonnage of material into, or sold by, the MRF? – It is the quantity sold by the MRFs
 - Is there information on what proportion of cardboard is from Amazon / e-commerce? – This was not specifically quantified

6. Questions and Comments from Council Members

- a. None

7. Public Comment Period

- a. Walter Willis (Solid Waste Agency of Lake County) asked if cost data is developed and available now or will be shared in a future presentation. Eunomia indicated it is being reviewed by IEPA now and will be in the report.

8. Next Meeting

- a. June 8, 12-1:30 pm CT via WebEx
- b. Meeting agenda will include a presentation from Can Manufacturers Institute and may include an additional presentation from Eunomia in preparation for delivery of the report at the end of June (this will be discussed with IEPA and finalized).

9. Adjournment

- a. The meeting adjourned at 1:33 pm CT; motion by Brad Cole, second by Lisa Disbrow.