

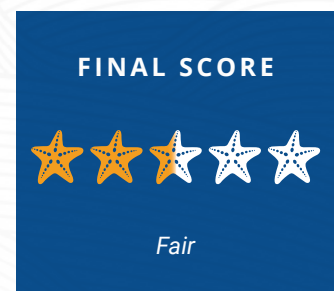
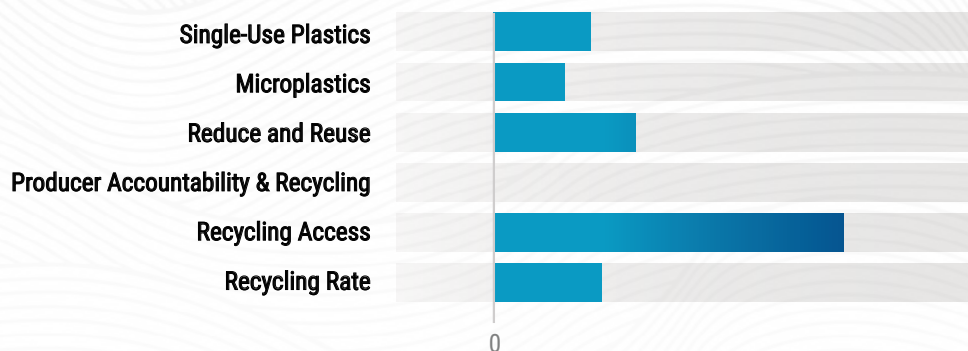
# United States OF PLASTICS



## Illinois

MISSOURI-MISSISSIPPI DRAINAGE

Illinois maintains a connection to the ocean through the Mississippi River, which flows into the Gulf, and through the Great Lakes, which flow into the Atlantic Ocean by way of the St. Lawrence River. Illinois sits on the shore of Lake Michigan, one of the five Great Lakes, which is essential to Illinois' communities and economy, supporting commerce, tourism, shipping, fishing and recreation. The lake also provides drinking water to millions of residents. Plastic pollution is a growing threat to this vital resource, with an estimated more than 22 million pounds of plastic pollution ending up in the Great Lakes each year and microplastics increasingly found in Great Lakes waters, sediments and even fish.<sup>1</sup> The state is a leader in the Great Lakes region in adopting policies to reduce plastic pollution, but many opportunities remain for continued progress.



<sup>1</sup> Hoffman, M.J. and E. Hittinger. (2017). [Marine Pollution Bulletin](#).



### Single-Use Plastics

Illinois prohibits hotels from providing personal care products in single-use plastic bottles.<sup>2</sup> It has not passed laws restricting the other single-use plastics included in our study, although it has taken steps to reduce government procurement of certain single-use plastics (see Reduce and Reuse below).



### Microplastics

The state has passed two laws aimed at gathering and increasing public availability of more information on microplastics to direct future action.<sup>3</sup>



### Reduce and Reuse

Illinois has passed laws to reduce plastic pollution through state purchasing, including by requiring state agencies to track and set goals to reduce



### Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have any extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. However, the state has enacted a law requiring the development of a Statewide Recycling Needs Assessment and Advisory Council, which will provide important information towards the development of an EPR program.<sup>6</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Illinois has not taken any actions to hold producers responsible for their products. Policies like comprehensive EPR with a deposit return system could increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.
- Given the high concentration of microplastics found in the Great Lakes, Illinois should consider policies to address microplastic pollution, such as requiring filters for new washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution, addressing pollution from pre-production plastic pellets and implementing recommendations from the International Joint Commission (IJC).<sup>7</sup>

## Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

- 1 Cigarette Butts
- 2 Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
- 3 Bottle Caps (Plastic)
- 4 Straws, Stirrers
- 5 Beverage Bottles (Glass)
- 6 Beverage Cans
- 7 Bottle Caps (Metal)
- 8 Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
- 9 Lids (Plastic)
- 10 Grocery Bags (Plastic)

## Microplastics are a Mega-Problem

Illinois has long been at the forefront of addressing microplastic pollution. In 2014, it became the first U.S. state to ban microbeads in personal care products, a move that set a precedent for additional state action and eventually, national law.<sup>8</sup> Illinois also collaborates with Canadian partners through the IJC to monitor and assess microplastic pollution in the Great Lakes. In 2024, the IJC's Great Lakes Science Advisory Board proposed a coordinated framework for microplastics monitoring and ecological risk assessment across the lakes.<sup>9</sup> This binational effort seeks to fill knowledge gaps regarding microplastic sources, distribution and impacts on aquatic life and human health, to inform future policy decisions to protect these critical freshwater resources.

<sup>2</sup> SB 2960, 103rd Gen. Assemb. (Ill. 2024).

<sup>3</sup> SB 1563, 103rd Gen. Assemb. (Ill. 2023); SB 1392, 101st Gen. Assemb. (Ill. 2019).

<sup>4</sup> SB 58, 103rd Gen. Assemb. (Ill. 2023) (expanded polystyrene); SB 1915, 102nd Gen. Assemb. (Ill. 2022) (state parks).

<sup>5</sup> SB 1715, 103rd Gen. Assemb. (Ill. 2023).

<sup>6</sup> SB 1555, 103rd Gen. Assemb. (Ill. 2023); "Statewide Recycling Needs Assessment Advisory Council." Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. Accessed May 2025.

<sup>7</sup> Kidd, K., et al. "Final Report of the IJC Great Lakes Science Advisory Board Work Group on Microplastics." Nov. 2024.

<sup>8</sup> SB 2727, 98th Gen. Ass. (Ill. 2014); Microbead-Free Waters Act of 2015, Pub. L. No. 114-114, 129 Stat. 3129 (2015).

<sup>9</sup> Kidd, K., et al. "Final Report of the IJC Great Lakes Science Advisory Board Work Group on Microplastics." Nov. 2024.