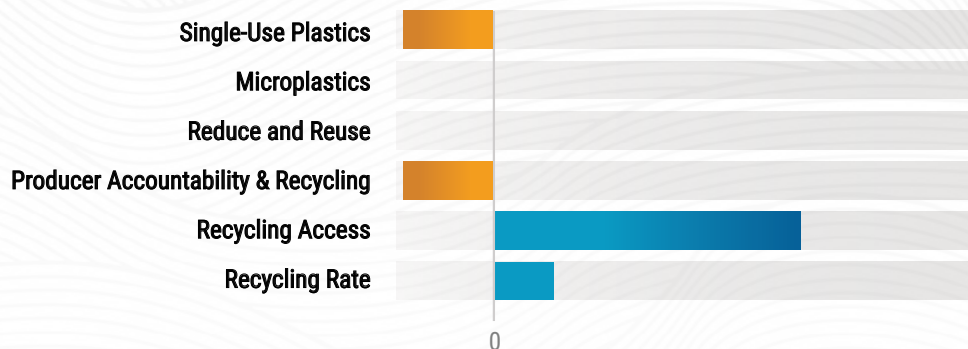


# United States OF PLASTICS

## Tennessee

MISSOURI-MISSISSIPPI DRAINAGE

Known for its vibrant music heritage, the Great Smoky Mountains, and rich biodiversity, Tennessee plays a key role in the broader network of U.S. waterways that connect to the ocean. The Tennessee River flows through much of the state and is a major tributary of the Ohio River, which then joins the Mississippi River before ultimately draining into the Gulf. These waterways are vital to Tennessee's economy, supporting agriculture, transportation, tourism and outdoor recreation. Additionally, the state's diverse ecosystems depend on clean and healthy water to sustain wildlife, including economically and ecologically important species such as the smallmouth bass and blue catfish. While the state relies on its connection to healthy waterways, Tennessee has yet to pass legislation to address plastic pollution and has enacted laws that could hinder further progress.





### Single-Use Plastics

Tennessee has a law limiting local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics and has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.<sup>1</sup>



### Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.



### Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.



### Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. The state has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.<sup>2</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Tennessee has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should:
  - Remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
  - Reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- Although Tennessee's recycling access rate is higher than some states, its recycling rate is still below 15% and some of the top items collected by ICC volunteers are readily recyclable. 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.

## Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

- Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
- Cigarette Butts
- Beverage Cans
- Beverage Bottles (Glass)
- Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
- Bottle Caps (Plastic)
- Grocery Bags (Plastic)
- Other Plastic Bags
- Fishing Line (1 yard/meter = 1 piece)
- Straws, Stirrers

## State Investments in Recycling

Tennessee is among many states that are considering the best EPR program for their state to address a landfill space shortage and the need for additional investments in expanding and improving recycling. Increasing recycling rates and recycling-associated jobs is a key part of these discussions. As well-crafted EPR is known to improve recycling rates,<sup>3</sup> EPR also has the potential to address these local concerns while securing domestic supply chains and delivering environmental benefits.

<sup>1</sup> HB 1021, 111th Gen. Assemb. (Tenn. 2019).

<sup>2</sup> SB 923, 111th Gen. Assemb. (Tenn. 2019). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.

<sup>3</sup> "Increasing Recycling Rate with EPR Policy." The Recycling Partnership.