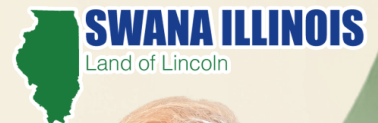




# WELCOME TO THE 2026 ILLINOIS CIRCULARITY CONFERENCE

HOSTED BY



August 19-20, 2026



EVEN Hotel & Tinley  
Park Convention Center



Tinley Park, Illinois

PRESENTED BY



**BARB DAY**

*Chair of Conference Committee*





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# WELCOME TO THE 2026 ILLINOIS CIRCULARITY CONFERENCE!

A Message from *Clair Ryan*  
President, Illinois Recycling Foundation

Welcome to the 2026 Illinois Circularity Conference!

I am honored to welcome you to this year's conference to share ideas, strengthen partnerships, and explore practical solutions that create real impact for our communities and neighbors.

Together, we can turn challenges into opportunities and build a cleaner, more resilient, and more circular Illinois.

Thank you for being part of this important work!



A Message from *Christina Seibert*  
President, SWANA Illinois Land of Lincoln Chapter

Welcome to the 2026 Illinois Circularity Conference. On behalf of the SWANA Illinois Land of Lincoln Chapter, I'm delighted to join our partner organizations in bringing together professionals across the state.

This conference is a platform to connect, learn, and collaborate on practical circularity. By working together, we can advance circularity, support our communities, and create lasting value for Illinois.

Thank you for being here and for the important role you play in Illinois's circularity journey.



## CONFERENCE PLANNING COMMITTEE

- Barb Day
- Clair Ryan
- Gina Peshek
- Brian Zimmerman
- Erica Helms
- Loren Williams
- Nathan Mihelich

## PROGRAMMING SUBCOMMITTEE

- Barb Day
- Clair Ryan
- Walter Willis
- Erica Helms
- Loren Williams
- Shea Walter
- Brian Zimmerman
- Nathan Mihelich



# DAY ONE — WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 19

## TIME

## SESSION / ACTIVITY

|                   |                                                                                                             |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 7:00 AM           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Registration Desk Opens</li></ul>                                   |
| 8:00-9:00 AM      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Registration, Coffee &amp; Exhibit Hall Opens</li></ul>             |
| 9:00-9:15 AM      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Welcome from The Battery Network &amp; Host Organizations</li></ul> |
| 9:15-10:15 AM     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Opening Keynote: Federal &amp; State Leadership</li></ul>           |
| 10:15-11:00 AM    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Morning Plenary: Illinois Statewide Needs Assessment</li></ul>      |
| 11:00-11:40 AM    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exhibitor Hall Break</li></ul>                                      |
| 11:40 AM-12:40 PM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Concurrent Sessions - Salon A &amp; Salon B</li></ul>               |
| 12:40-1:45 PM     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lunch &amp; Illinois Recycling Awards</li></ul>                     |
| 1:45-2:45 PM      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Concurrent Sessions - Salon A &amp; Salon B</li></ul>               |
| 2:45-3:45 PM      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Concurrent Sessions - Salon A &amp; Salon B</li></ul>               |
| 3:45-4:15 PM      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Afternoon Break - Exhibit Hall Open</li></ul>                       |
| 4:15-5:15 PM      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Afternoon Plenary: EPR Comes to Illinois</li></ul>                  |
| 5:30-6:30 PM      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Networking Happy Hour with Exhibitors...and Loop!</li></ul>         |
| 6:30-7:30 PM      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dinner</li></ul>                                                    |
| 7:30-9:30 PM      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Evening Entertainment &amp; Networking</li></ul>                    |
| 9:30 PM           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Day 1 concludes; Exhibit Hall closes</li></ul>                      |

### SESSION GUIDE

Page 5-7: compare the concurrent tracks side-by-side.

### EXHIBITOR HALL

Visit sponsors and exhibitors during scheduled breaks and happy hour.

### EVENING

Happy hour 5:30, dinner 6:30, then Bill Martin and DJ Erica from 7:30- 9:30



# 11:40 AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS

*Compare both tracks side-by-side and choose the session that best fits your interests.*

## EDUCATION / DIVERSION

### Real Solutions. Real Impact.

- Green Era: A Working Model of the Circular Economy - **Susannah Sun, Green Era**
- Source-Separated Organics Collection in Lake Forest - **Tommy Vaughan, WasteNot**
- Reducing Institutional Food Waste at County Facilities - **Zach Samaras, ISTC**  
**Amy O'Rourke, Cook County Department of Public Health**

*Moderator: Melanie Mendez, IRF Board*

Practical Illinois case studies show circular solutions to food waste through community-scale collection of source-separated organics, planning and implementation of waste reduction practices at public institutions, and industrial scale processing of organic waste to produce usable digestate and RNG. Learn how programs are built, what challenges arise, and which lessons can be replicated in municipal, institutional, and community settings.

#### CHOOSE THIS SESSION IF:

- You want practical organics and food-waste solutions
- You value community and institution scale case studies
- You need replicable strategies for organics diversion
- You want implementation lessons from working Illinois programs

**SALON  
A**

## INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

### Textiles: Collection to Circularity

- From Chicagoland to Global Markets: The Real Path of Recycled Textiles - **Justin Woycke, Chicago Textile Recycling**  
**Merleanne Hiatt Rampale, SWALCO**
- From Classroom to Circularity : Keeping Clothing Out of Landfills - **Paige Wilkins, Re-Tex**

*Moderator: Brian Zimmerman, IRF Board*

Follow textiles from Illinois collection points through sorting, grading, domestic resale, export and fiber markets, then connecting those downstream realities to local education and diversion. The session explains how clothing quality, market conditions, public communication, and program design influence whether clothing is reused, recycled or discarded.

#### CHOOSE THIS SESSION IF:

- You want to understand what happens after textile collection
- You need better insight into reuse and recycling markets
- You are designing or communicating a clothing-diversion program
- You value supply-chain transparency and practical education

**SALON  
B**

*"Every action toward sustainability matters. By recovering resources, reducing waste, and working together, we can build a stronger circular economy and a more sustainable future."*

**WALTER S. WILLIS**  
*Executive Director, Solid Waste Agency of Lake County*  
*SWANA IL, Board of Directors*



# 1:45 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS

*Two sessions with different focus; choose one that fits your goals.*

## EDUCATION / DIVERSION

### New Approaches to Resident Engagement

- **Feed the Cart Campaign** - Juliet Mathey, Metropolitan Mayors Caucus
- **Recycle Coach Implementation** - Carter O'Brien, City of Chicago, Dept. of Streets and Sanitation

*Moderator: Christina Seibert, SWANA IL Board*

Coordinated regional campaigns and real-time digital tools are changing how Illinois communities reach residents. This session pairs the grant-funded Feed the Cart initiative with Chicago's Recycle Coach rollout across 625,000 households, focusing on outreach design, baseline data, partner coordination, behavior change, and measurable improvements in diversion.

#### CHOOSE THIS SESSION IF:

- You want stronger resident engagement on curbside recycling (and beyond)
- You need clearer recycling communication
- You want an example of real-world implementation and metrics
- You are looking for digital outreach tools

**SALON  
A**

## INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

### What Really Happens to Batteries After Collection?

- **Marta Keane** - The Battery Network, Regional State Stewardship Manager
- **Stephanie Weeks** - The Battery Network, Senior Product Portfolio Manager

*Moderator: Aaron Harmon, IRF Board*

This session provides a practical overview of battery stewardship in Illinois, including options available to local governments and recyclers to start collecting today through the state program. Experts from The Battery Network will discuss the pathway of batteries post-collection, including intake, sorting, chemistry-specific handling, safe storage, processing and downstream markets. Challenges associated with damaged or defective batteries will also be addressed.

#### CHOOSE THIS SESSION IF:

- You manage or support battery collection or would like to start
- You'd like more clarity on the circular path of batteries
- You prioritize battery-associated fire prevention and safe handling

**SALON  
B**

 **GINA PESHEK**

*IRF Vice President*

*"Every thread matters. Every shirt, towel, blanket, pair of shoes, and piece of fabric you recycle helps reduce landfill waste, conserve natural resources, and create opportunities for reuse. What you no longer need can become a valuable resource for someone else. Recycle today to protect tomorrow."*





# 2:45 PM CONCURRENT SESSIONS

Two breakout tracks at the same time – compare and choose what fits you best!

## EDUCATION / DIVERSION

### Packaging Solutions: Less Waste and Safer Foodware

- Packaging in Circulation - Aleksandra Plewa, EcoShip
- PFAS-Free, Compostable Foodware for Chicagoland Food Businesses - Cassie Carrol, EneerSense Resilience Center / Illinois Green Business Program

Moderator: Zach Samaras, IRF Board

Explore practical strategies to reduce packaging waste across shipping and food service. This session pairs reusable packaging approaches with safer, PFAS-free compostable foodware solutions for Chicagoland businesses. Presenters will share real-world examples, funding and policy context, implementation considerations, and lessons for building circular systems that are both practical and cost-conscious. Learn how businesses, communities, and local partners can move from promising ideas to workable waste-reduction solutions.

**SALON  
A**

#### CHOOSE THIS SESSION IF:

- You care about packaging waste from shipping and food service
- You want safer foodware options
- You need business-facing implementation lessons
- You are building community partnerships
- You want practical ideas that can move from concept to implementation

## INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

### Paper Markets, Resource Capture & Reuse

- Evolving Paper Supply and Demands - George Ward Jr., Waste Diversion Director Midwest Paper Retriever
- Recycling 2.0: DIY Approaches to Resource Capture and Reuse - Carolee Kokola, Bubbly Dynamics LLC / The Plant

Moderator: Gina Peshek, IRF Board

Paper markets and resource-recovery systems are evolving. George Ward Jr. examines changes in paper generation, recovered-fiber markets, contamination, pricing, processing impacts, and end-market acceptance. Carolee Kokola shares practical, low-cost approaches to capturing and reusing materials through hands-on circular strategies. Together, the presentations connect changing market conditions with real-world opportunities for resource recovery and reuse.

**SALON  
B**

#### CHOOSE THIS SESSION IF:

- You want to understand changing paper and recovered-fiber markets
- You support recycling, reuse, or MRF operations
- You need practical resource-capture and reuse ideas
- You want to connect end-market realities with on-the-ground circular solutions



Please recycle after use.



# 4:15 PM PLENARY SESSION

*All attendees reconvene for a plenary on the future of producer responsibility in Illinois.*

## GENERAL SESSION ROOM

### Producer Responsibility Comes to Illinois: Batteries, Electronics, Packaging, and What Comes Next

- Roxane Peggs - The Battery Network
- Jacki Cooperider - Illinois EPA
- Christina Seibert - SWANCC, IL Product Stewardship Council
- Jason Linnell - National Center for Electronics Recycling

*Moderator: Walter Willis, SWANA IL Board*

Illinois is entering a new phase of materials management as producer-funded recovery and recycling programs expand across batteries, electronics, packaging, and other material streams. This plenary brings together leaders working across product stewardship and extended producer responsibility to examine how existing programs intersect, where implementation challenges remain, and what may come next for Illinois. Panelists will explore program design, collection and recovery infrastructure, cross-material challenges, producer responsibility, and the policy landscape shaping Illinois' circular economy.

#### THIS PLENARY WILL EXPLORE:

- What producer responsibility means for Illinois
- How battery, electronics, and packaging programs intersect
- Implementation challenges for communities, recyclers, and producers
- Where Illinois product stewardship and EPR policy may go next





# EVENING PROGRAM

*Wednesday - Evening Entertainment!*

**DON'T MISS THE HIGHLIGHT OF THE NIGHT!**

DJ ERICA

*Official ICC 2026 DJ*



Setting the soundtrack for connection and celebration. Expect feel-good energy, favorite hits, and great vibes all night long.

BILL MARTIN

*Magician & Entertainer*



Amazing close-up magic that will surprise, engage, and spark conversation – the perfect addition to the unforgettable evening.



# DAY TWO — THURSDAY, AUGUST 20

Registration desk opens at 7:00 AM | Formal conference program concludes at 11:15 AM

## TIME

## SESSION / ACTIVITY

- |                  |                                     |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 7:00 AM          | • Registration Desk Opens           |
| 8:00- 9:00 AM    | • Breakfast                         |
| 9:00-10:00 AM    | • Concurrent Sessions - Salon A & B |
| 10:00 - 11:00 AM | • SWANA Young Professionals Plenary |
| 11:00 - 11:15 AM | • Closing Remarks                   |

## OPTIONAL THREE-STOP CIRCULAR ECONOMY TOUR

11:30- 12:00 PM  
BOARDING

12:00 PM  
DEPARTURE

3:00 - 3:30 PM  
ESTIMATED RETURN

*A guided afternoon tour of three Chicagoland circular economy sites - hard-to-recycle materials, organics-to-energy, and electronics refurbishment - showing how conference topics operate at street level*

1

12:30 PM

### CHaRM Center

#### Hard-to-Recycle Materials

*A permanent drop-off facility at South Suburban College for difficult-to-recycle materials. Programs include a recycling warehouse, composting, and mobile event services.*

2

1:30 PM

### Green Era

#### Depackaging & Anaerobic Digestion

*A community-owned circular-economy campus on Chicago's South Side that converts food waste into renewable energy, usable digestate, and good local jobs.*

3

2:30 PM

### PCs for People

#### Electronics Refurbishment & Digital Equity

*See how donated electronics are refurbished and redistributed to low-income households and nonprofits, closing the loop on e-waste while bridging the digital divide.*

**Field Trip Registration Is Required.**



# 9:00 AM CONCURRENT SESSIONS

*Two breakout tracks at the same time – compare and choose what fits you best!*

## EDUCATION / DIVERSION

### Non-Profits and Religious Organizations Leading Diversion

- Specialty Recycling as Landfill Diversion in Downstate Thrift Stores - Nathan Montgomery, Salt & Light  
Betsy Ruckman, University of Illinois
- Donate Used Furniture: Sustainability & Ending Furniture Poverty - Mary Novak, Chicago Furniture Bank

*Moderator: Loren Williams, IRF Board*

Explore practical approaches to keeping valuable materials out of landfills while providing people with access to affordable necessities through specialty recycling, reuse, and donation. Learn how organizations are turning unwanted but reusable goods into resources while creating environmental and community benefits.

#### CHOOSE THIS SESSION IF:

- You want to explore specialty recycling and landfill diversion
- You are interested in reuse and extending the life of materials
- You are interested in increased partnership with community non-profits and/or religious organizations
- You value practical community-based diversion solutions

**SALON  
A**

## INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

### Food Waste Program Update: Large-Scale Organics Diversion in Practice

- Walter Willis - Solid Waste Agency of Lake County
- John O'Halloran - Vanguard Renewables

*Moderator: Brian Zimmerman, IRF Board*

Take a closer look at the potential for large-scale organics diversion in Illinois. This session will look at the history and current state of practice of organics diversion, and what potential future policy to improve food waste diversion might look like. Hear a practitioner's view of how large-scale organics diversion has worked in other areas of the country, including perspectives on hauling logistics, processing capacity, and markets for resulting compost, digestate and renewable natural gas.

#### CHOOSE THIS SESSION IF:

- You want to understand large-scale organics diversion
- You are interested in Illinois organics legislation
- You want insight into hauling, processing, and end markets
- You want practical perspectives on food-scrap recovery

**SALON  
B**



Please recycle after use.



**ROOM KEY**

|                                                                                     |                             |                                                                                     |                                        |                                                                                       |                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
|  | <b>General Session Room</b> |  | <b>Salon A</b><br>South Pavilion 3 & 4 |  | <b>Salon B</b><br>South Pavilion 5 & 6 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|

## QUICK ROOM KEY



Salon B – South Pavilion 5 &amp; 6

## LIVE AGENDA & RESOURCES



Scan for updates,  
speaker information,  
and conference  
resources.