



ECOLOGY NEWS

ACTION CENTER

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Summer 2023

Yard Smart Garden Walk

The Ecology Action Center is holding its 21st annual Yard Smart Garden Walk on Saturday, July 8, 2023 from 9:00am – 1:00pm. This free tour highlights beautiful and functional yards in our community that protect our environment, benefit wildlife, and use few or no synthetic chemicals.

The tour features multiple home gardens of different styles, and this year we are collaborating with John Wesley Powell Audubon to highlight yards that encourage and support birds! The walk will conclude with lunch from Under the Ground BloNo and guest speaker Bill Davison. Participants should bring their own reusable water bottles, and dress for the weather. Participants are encouraged to carpool to conserve fossil fuels and reduce pollution, so check with your friends/family to see if they are going, and consider riding to the event with them.



The Yard Smart program promotes a more sustainable approach to lawn and garden maintenance. Working with nature to build a healthier ecosystem in both the soil below ground and the yard above ground, while reducing pollutants that runoff into our local water supplies will create a more beautiful, sustainable and safer environment for everyone— children and adults, pets and wildlife. The program encourages local homeowners to reduce the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, to conserve natural resources such as water and fossil fuels, and to make room for wildlife in their yards. Yard Smart Certification recognizes local homeowners who use ecologically sustainable practices in maintaining their yards and who realize that their lawn, garden and landscaping decisions affect the health of the whole community.

This event is free, but our staff works hard to make this event happen, so we do encourage donations to help offset the cost of the event and to help the Ecology Action Center continue its efforts to promote a healthy local environment! We will send event details to registered participants closer to the event date.

Please register at ecologyactioncenter.org/event/2023yardsmart



Sustainable Camping

The number of people camping in North America rose by a record 3.9 million households in 2020 as people sought the outdoors during COVID isolation. Camping now makes up about 1/3 of the leisure travel market. As more people spend time enjoying the outdoors, it is important to remember to be good stewards of the environment. Here are some tips to follow to ensure you are a good steward while camping.

Leave no trace! Make sure to leave an area nicer than when you found it. This means pack out everything you packed in, including trash, food waste, and toilet paper. While away from your camp site, keep your trash and food out of reach from wildlife. You might be tempted to throw your banana peel on the ground when done with it, but you should take it with you! Food scraps can attract and harm wildlife. If toilets are not available, bury all human waste 6-8 inches deep and at least 200 feet away from running water, camp rounds, and trails. If you use toilet paper, please pack it out or dispose of it in a trash can at the campgrounds. Never leave used or unused toilet paper uncovered on the ground. Make sure that pet waste is picked up and disposed of properly as well.

It's not camping if you don't have s'mores! Make sure you use wood that came from at most 50 miles away from your camp site for your campfire. Firewood can hold invasive and environmentally detrimental insects such as emerald ash borer beetles. Using local wood helps to keep the forest safe and beautiful. If a campfire isn't your jam and you prefer to use a propane camping stove, make sure that dispose of propane properly. Empty or partially used propane bottles can be dropped off at Illini Fire Equipment located at 1709 West Washington Street in Bloomington.

Another great way to camp sustainably is to stay local! Illinois has beautiful state parks and wildlife areas. Stop by Moraine View State Recreation Area in Le Roy, Clinton Lake in Clinton, or Starved Rock State Park in Oglesby. Enjoying the great parks in our own backyard reduces the amount of fuel and greenhouse gas emissions for travel and shows love and appreciation for what Illinois has to offer.



Energy Price Relief

Good news! Residents will see some relief on their energy bills this summer. Ameren and Nicor have lowered their rates.

The new Ameren supply rate for June – September 2023 is 7.877 cents per kilowatt-hour. Residents with Ameren service in Bloomington and Normal participating in municipal aggregation have their electricity supplied by Constellation Energy at a rate of 7.859 cents per kilowatt-hour. Ameren will release their non-summer rates for October – May in September.

Nicor Gas lowered their rate to 39 cents per therm which is down from 69 cents per therm in January, and down from \$1.24 per therm last June.

If you have questions about municipal aggregation, your utility bills, or about how to lower your energy costs further with energy efficiency and/or renewable energy, please contact Larissa Armstrong at larmstrong@ecologyactioncenter.org or 309-454-3169 x15.

The Problem with Polystyrene

Polystyrene (colloquially called Styrofoam) was developed in 1839 and the first Styrofoam coffee cup was sold in the 1960s. In order to use polystyrene for packaging and coffee cups various gases are used to convert it to a foam. Polystyrene in its foam form can expand 40-to-80 times its original volume, but only around 3 percent heavier. The majority of this increased volume and weight is due to the gases added during the foam forming process.

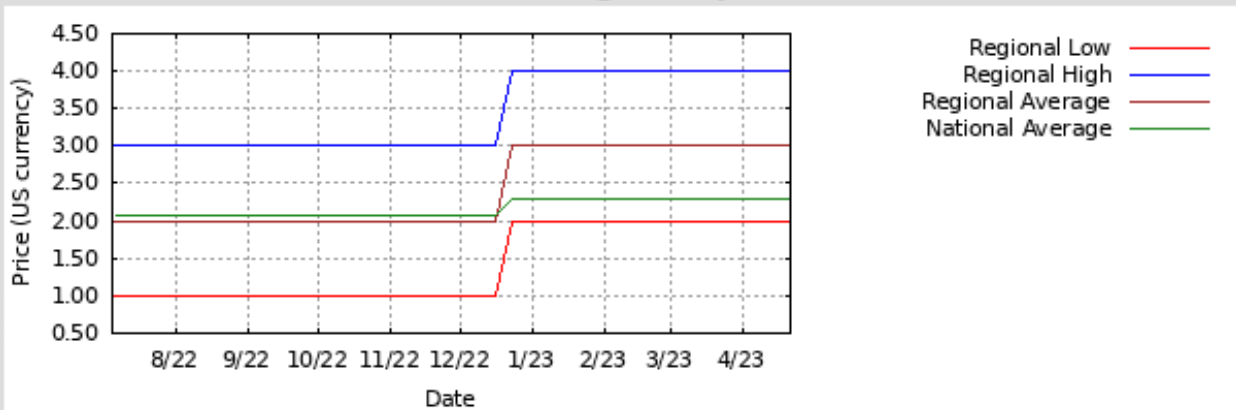
In theory, polystyrene foam might seem harmless since it is mostly gas and very little plastic. However, when polystyrene foam is thrown away, it takes up a lot of space in the landfill as it is not easily compressed. As Americans continue to throw away vast amounts of trash every day, space is increasingly limited in landfills. Additionally, despite polystyrene foam being only 2% plastic it still takes hundreds of years to breakdown in a landfill.

Polystyrene foam being mostly gas also affects its recyclability. Polystyrene foam cannot be recycled in McLean County. The closest place that recycles polystyrene foam is Dart Container Corporation located at 1505 East Main Street in Urbana. They recycle rinsed cups, rinsed containers, and packing inserts.

There are many reasons why most municipalities are unable to recycle polystyrene foam. One reason is that the majority of polystyrene foam products are food and beverage containers that are not easily or reliably cleaned by residents before it enters the recycling stream. The second and most important reason is that recycling polystyrene foam is not profitable. Since polystyrene foam is mostly gas and cannot be compacted easily, the cost to transport it is more than the plastic it contains. In the image you can see the market value of polystyrene foam (expanded polystyrene shortened to EPS) in cents per pound. In April of 2023, the regional average was about 3 cents per pound. Compare this to Plastic PET (like jars and bottles) which was a regional average of about 15 cents per pound.

CHICAGO (Midwest / Central) Plastics Polystyrene EPS (Baled, ¢/lb, picked up)

Pricing History



Thus, with the market value currently low and transportation and labor costs high, recycling polystyrene would require significant financial subsidy.



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