

# JOURNEY OF SINGLE-USE ITEMS

When you use single-use items, do you ever stop to think where they go?

## STOP 1: BUY & DISCARD

Most single-use items cannot be recycled, like plastic bags, coffee cups, plastic utensils, and straws. Even though some are plastic, none can be recycled in curbside recycling programs. After you use the item once, you throw it away, but then... where does it go?



## STOP 2: CURBSIDE PICKUP

The single-use item will live in your garbage bin until your trash is picked up by haulers.

In Cook County, the average resident throws away 8.2 lbs of garbage every day. <sup>1</sup>



## STOP 3: TRANSFER STATION

Haulers from throughout a region bring the collected waste to a central location- a transfer station. There, waste is accumulated and stocked into larger vehicles for the next step on its journey.

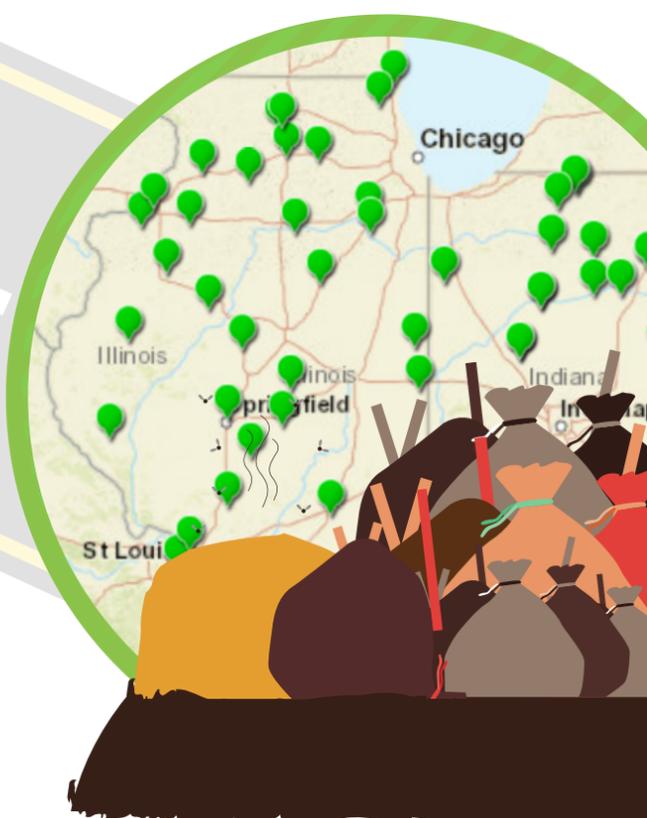
In Suburban Cook County, there are 19 transfer stations.



## STOP 4: LANDFILL

From the transfer station, the waste is brought to a landfill. Cook County exports 100% of our waste to sites beyond our border. It may end up in other parts of Illinois, or even in Indiana.

The waste in landfills generates the 3rd largest source of human-related methane in the U.S, contributing to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in a more persistent and potent manner than carbon dioxide. <sup>2</sup>



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By taking our pledge and using a reusable item, you have the potential to **divert waste** from landfills and **reduce GHG emissions**.

1. Cook County Solid Waste Management Plan 2018

2. United States Environmental Protection Agency, Basic Information about Landfill Gases

# HOW DO REUSABLE ITEMS HELP FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE?

## REDUCED RESOURCES

## REDUCED ENERGY

### 1 CREATE

Single-use items are thrown away and must be replaced after each use, requiring more materials and energy to go into the production of new, throw-away goods. If the item is plastic or contains plastic elements, oil or natural gas were more than likely a key ingredient! This requires further extraction of nonrenewable resources and continues our reliance on fossil fuels.

Production of plastic consumes fossil fuels not only as the main ingredient, but in energy to extract the fossil fuels, to transport the fuels, to produce the materials, and to ship the plastic where it will be used. This requires the burning of fossil fuels and emission of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas (GHG), into Earth's atmosphere.

### 2 DISCARD

After one use, the products are sent to landfills or waste incinerators where more carbon dioxide is emitted. For some plastic items, these emissions can be reduced through recycling, but not every plastic is accepted by recycling facilities and contamination of recycling batches may still send plastics to landfills or incineration.

## IT ADDS UP.

These GHGs create a blanket-like effect that warms Earth and causes **climate change**.

For 2019, a conservative estimate of the GHGs from global plastic production and incineration alone is equal to **189 coal power plants** (five hundred megawatt plants at full capacity)

A reusable item only needs to be created **once**. Those items can be used for a long time if you take care of them.

Even with reusable items, **reduce** your environmental impact.

- Do not collect countless reusable coffee cups, straws, or bags. **Use what you need.**
- Reusable items take energy and resources to create, transport, and if thrown away, will add to landfill GHG emissions, just like single-use items.
- Strive to keep these reusable items for as long as possible. **#UseReuse**



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Join Cook County in our fight against  
climate change

 @CookEnviro

Cook County acknowledges that single-use items are a necessity in some of the lives of our residents and invites those residents to combat climate change in alternative ways.