



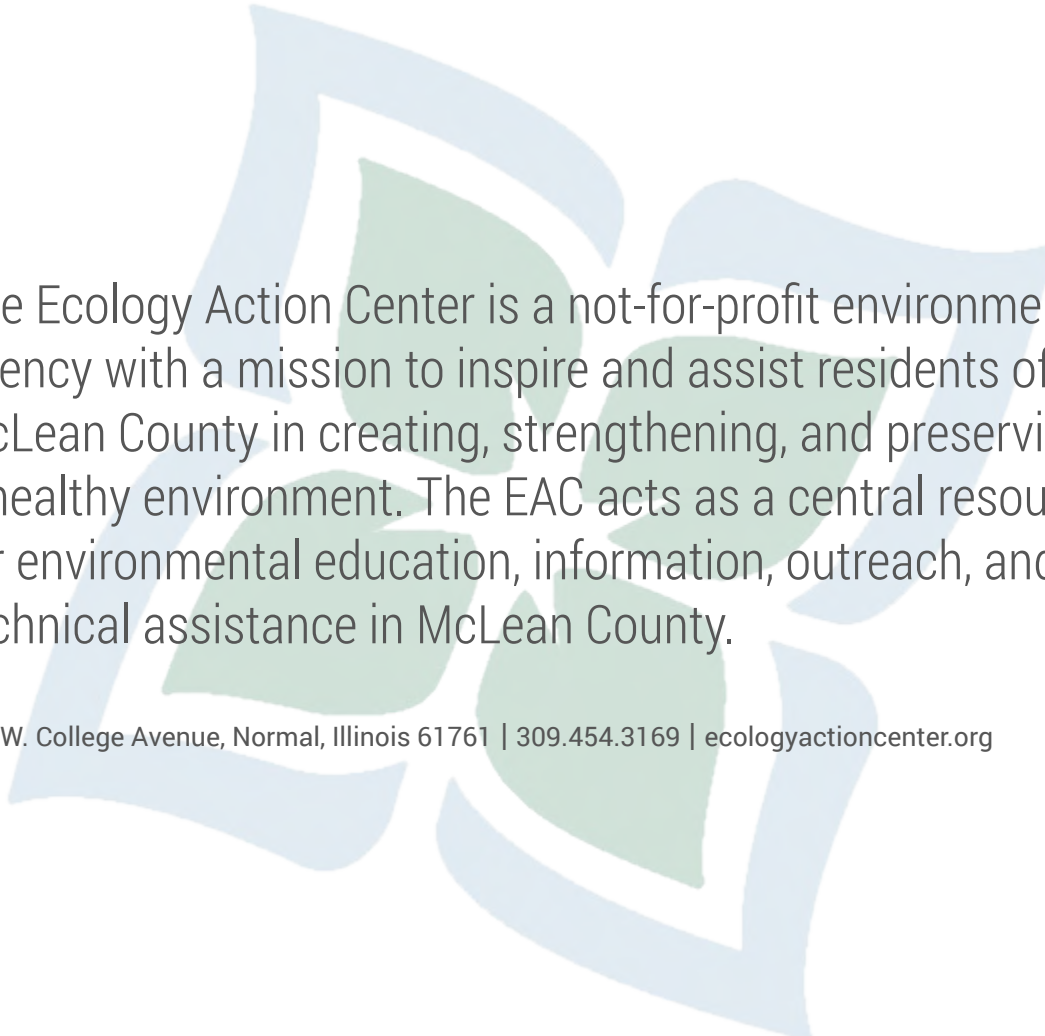
**ECOLOGY**  
ACTION CENTER

# 2016

## Annual Report



# 2016: A Turning Point



The Ecology Action Center is a not-for-profit environmental agency with a mission to inspire and assist residents of McLean County in creating, strengthening, and preserving a healthy environment. The EAC acts as a central resource for environmental education, information, outreach, and technical assistance in McLean County.

202 W. College Avenue, Normal, Illinois 61761 | 309.454.3169 | [ecologyactioncenter.org](http://ecologyactioncenter.org)

I typically use this space in the annual report to provide a summary of the year's accomplishments and hints of hope for the new year. Opportunities to brag about our successes and recognize the hard work of the EAC staff and the positive impact it has on our community fill me with pride. None of this has changed. We accomplished a lot this past year, and I will get to that part, but first I need to take a moment to address the harsher realities we also face in the near future.

There are multiple ways to see 2016 as a turning point:

- The EAC, on behalf of our local government entities, began the planning process for a new 20-year solid waste management plan. This effort is undeniably a formal recognition that, while McLean County does recycle more and waste less than it did in the past, despite all our progress, our community-wide recycling rates are stagnating. Since raising our target from 25% 13 years ago, we have come close, but never reached our 40% recycling rate goal. We need to do more, especially in light of the declining capacity of the McLean County Landfill, now estimated to begin closure sometime in early 2018.
- Climate change is here:
  - 2016 was the hottest year on the historical record and the third consecutive record-breaking year.
  - Atmospheric carbon dioxide is up to 405.25 parts per million (ppm), the highest it's been in 650,000 years. In 2016, CO2 levels never dropped below 400 ppm, the first time this has ever happened during the human existence.
  - The first American climate refugees began their resettlement from Isle De Jean Charles, Louisiana, to higher ground.
- Our country elected a new President, and his administration quickly demonstrated its intent to roll back decades of environmental protections and censor the critical science needed to help protect our health, well-being, and way of life.

The challenges of providing for a healthy local environment and community continue to grow. Thankfully, we have broad-based support across the Bloomington-Normal and McLean County community. Our visibility is at its height, our partnerships are strong, and the patronage of our financial contributors, sponsors, funders, and volunteers is at its greatest. Simply put, as we transition into this period of unprecedented challenges, we have never been more prepared. Due to continued growth over the past several years, our staffing levels are at an all-time high, and we have more established program areas than ever before.

In 2016, we interacted with local residents **1,889,745 times**—our highest number yet. We're going to break that record again this year as we continue to spearhead local efforts for a healthy and safe environment.

Thank you all for doing your part—your contributions of your time and resources are critical. But please join me in 2017 as we all redouble our efforts for the good of current and future generations!



Michael Brown | Executive Director

# 2016 Highlights

## Winter

- Conducted 26 home energy audits. | [Page 16](#)
- 1,765 children in our community pledged to become “Water Pollution Police” after participating in EAC-led programs in 68 classrooms. This is the highest number of 3rd-graders reached since these programs began in 2007.
- Discussed dangers of radon with 235 homeowners at the Bloomington-Normal Area Home Builder’s Association Home Show.

## Spring

- Co-sponsored the Illinois Sustainable Living & Wellness Expo. | [Page 19](#)
- Organized a Sugar Creek and Constitution Trail cleanup event as part of Bloomington-Normal Cleanup Week. | [Page 13](#)
- Held a mega recycling event with conjunction with the Illinois Sustainable Living and Wellness Expo in April with over 200 households participating.

## Summer

- Launched Sugar Creek Stewards project, with EAC staff and volunteers clearing local waterways of invasive species and replacing them with native plants to improve stream buffers. | [Page 13](#)
- Held the 14th Annual Yard Smart Garden Walk. | [Pages 12, 18](#)
- Promoted zero-waste strategies at Uptown Normal public events by providing vendors at the Sugar Creek Arts Festival with reusable water bottles and free water refills, as well as providing cob composting at the Sweet Corn Blues Fest. | [Page 7](#)

## Autumn

- Co-hosted a recycling event with Illinois Wesleyan University to celebrate America Recycles Day. | [Page 19](#)
- Visited 90% of 4th-grade classrooms throughout McLean County with waste reduction and recycling messages. This represents the highest level ever achieved in the goal to reach all school children with this program. 89 classrooms and more than 2,000 people participated. | [Page 6](#)



# Education & Outreach



## EDUCATION & COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Many people suggest that the EAC should "get into the schools" for programs. What they may not know is...

WE VISITED EVERY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN MCLEAN COUNTY IN 2016!

The EAC is contracted to try to visit **EVERY 4TH-GRADE CLASS** with waste reduction information, and most 3rd-grade classes for water pollution prevention education

We made **157 CLASSROOM VISITS** including 89 4th-grade classes and 68 3rd-grade classes

IN ADDITION TO THESE CLASSROOM PROGRAMS, WE REACHED:

**3,800 PEOPLE** at 80 community presentations and events

**379 PEOPLE** at 9 libraries throughout McLean County

"Thank you for talking to us on Friday. I learned a lot of new things. My family made lots of changes around the house. We will take other bags when we go shopping instead of the plastic bags. I had fun listening to you!"

— Note from a student

The EAC provides:

1. Solid waste education to fulfill the Illinois Solid Waste Planning and Recycling Act requirements for McLean County, Bloomington, and Normal;
2. Storm water education for Bloomington, Normal, McLean County, and the Bloomington-Normal Reclamation District to meet the public education requirements of their National Pollution Discharge Elimination System Phase II Storm Water Management Plans;
3. Energy efficiency outreach for Bloomington and Normal, including Home Energy and Small Business Assessment Programs;
4. Radon education as part of the McLean County Radon Program, with funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Illinois Emergency Management Agency;
5. Air quality data through our Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory process; this time around, the program will also include strategic planning for emission reduction;
6. Distribution of resources on numerous sustainability topics.

## Community Outreach

The Ecology Action Center participates in many events throughout the community, from business-sponsored health and wellness fairs for company employees to public events.

We are thrilled to be able to "walk the talk" at two major summer events in Uptown Normal – to actually demonstrate the philosophies and behaviors we encourage daily.

We provided "water wagon" service at Sugar Creek Arts Festival. In previous years, artists were provided with over 2,000 single use bottles of water over the course of the two day event. Staff and volunteers from the EAC and the McLean County Art Center work together to distribute reusable water bottles to the artists, and then deliver cold water to them multiple times each day, thereby keeping those 2,000+ bottles out of the waste stream! Free cold water refills are also available to festival goers at the EAC tent, where additional EAC information is distributed.

Thousands of corn cobs were composted instead of landfilled thanks to EAC staff and volunteers at the EAC tent at the Sweet Corn and Blues Fest. Midwest Fiber provided compost bins and transportation, and the EAC offered education and cob collection!

### Other events we participated in include:

- Fell Arboretum Plant Sale
- David Davis Mansion Glorious Garden Walk
- Light the Night cycling event
- Master Gardeners Home, Lawn and Garden Day
- Autumn Fest, ISU Horticulture Center
- McLean Chamber of Commerce Nonprofit Showcase

# Solid Waste Program

The Ecology Action Center serves as the solid waste agency for McLean County, the City of Bloomington, and the Town of Normal, and is funded through the McLean County Solid Waste Fund.

The EAC assists residents and businesses in

- reducing waste
- increasing recycling
- properly disposing hazardous waste

through numerous educational and outreach programs and local events.

## McLean County Landfill

Every year, the reports detailing the remaining capacity of the McLean County Landfill indicate the ever-increasing proximity to an inevitable event:

**Our only remaining local landfill will likely begin closing sometime in early 2018.**

This is in addition to the EAC's own annual calculations of total community-wide waste generation and overall recycling rates, which are now understood to show that actual progress toward and beyond our long-held recycling rate goal of 40% is now stagnating despite excellent recycling programs offered across our community.

It is largely these two factors that led the Ecology Action Center to propose to our local government partners that we choose not to follow through on the state of Illinois mandate for a five-year update to the McLean County Solid Waste Management Plan. Instead, the EAC suggested that we do away with the 25-year old plan, start from scratch, and create an entirely new 20-year solid waste management plan. Given how much has changed since 1991 in terms of recycling technologies, attitudes and perceptions by residents, commodity markets, and the regulatory environment, a new solid waste plan will enable our community to more assertively approach our needs for the next two decades.

Accordingly, the EAC staff spent much of 2016 engaging stakeholder groups for discussions of problems and brainstorming of solutions, while also researching the pros and cons of a variety of new waste technologies. The end of the year found the process about half complete; a few remaining gaps were identified and four more focus groups were formed, which will meet in the first part of 2017. The data collected from these groups will allow for the prioritization of key strategies that will make up the new solid waste management plan.

How are we helping?

EAC efforts to promote increased recycling and waste reduction over the course of the year included the following:



Answered 802 phone calls and other inquiries about the disposal of household hazardous waste and recycling



Received 35,027 visits on EAC's website regarding solid waste, recycling, and hazardous waste, and managed McLean County Freecycle as an online resource for finding new homes for usable items



Promoted waste reduction, recycling, composting, and proper disposal of household hazardous waste through social media resulting in over 71,711 interactions.

2,221

Reached 2,221 4th-grade students through 89 recycling and waste reduction educational programs in local schools

Coordinated Bloomington-Normal Cleanup week in partnership with the City of Bloomington and Town of Normal in April, including holding a one-day cleanup event of Constitution Trail and Sugar Creek with 75 volunteers collecting approximately 1 ton of trash.



Sponsored Earth Day on WJBC with over 25,000 listeners and ran a full-page advertisement in The Pantagraph on Earth Day listing community resources

In 2016, we also...



Held **6 composter workshops** with a total of 19 participants

Co-organized the Illinois Sustainable Living and Wellness Expo with **3,000 attendees** as a model zero-waste event



Provided extensive coverage of waste issues—including the pending landfill closure, recycling, and the new solid waste planning process—on local radio stations reaching **thousands of listeners**.

Initiated early planning for the **2017 Household Hazardous Waste Collection** due to significant changes in host site availability

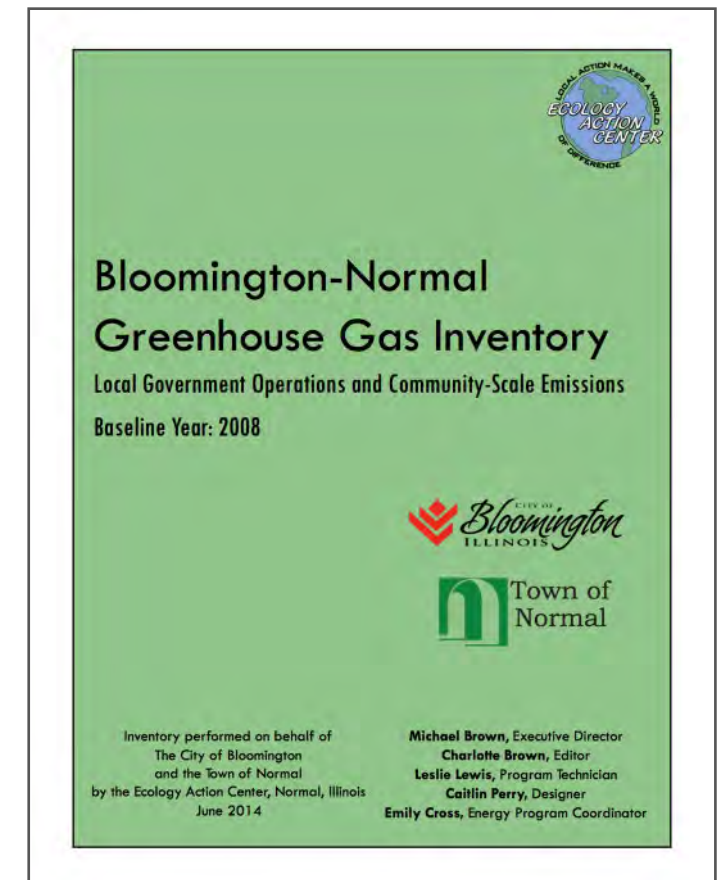
# GHG Emissions Inventory

The Ecology Action Center is currently in the process of completing its **second inventory of greenhouse gas emissions for Bloomington-Normal**. A greenhouse gas emissions inventory is a tool that quantifies carbon dioxide and related emissions so that a community can regularly evaluate its progress toward meeting local goals for reducing them. This inventory addresses emissions and sources for Bloomington-Normal for calendar year 2015.

For the 2015 greenhouse gas emissions inventory, EAC is using new software, ClearPath, which was developed by the Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI). This software is much more advanced than the software previously used for the 2008 baseline report and will be used to help collect, organize, and analyze data.

The EAC plans to publish a revised draft of the initial 2008 baseline report by late fall 2017, in addition to the 2015 report, Bloomington-Normal Greenhouse Gas Inventory—Local Government Operations and Community-Scale Emissions.

Bloomington-Normal is in a position to keep implementing common-sense strategies that not only help reduce climate-changing greenhouse gases, but also save money, conserve energy, improve air quality, and preserve precious natural resources.



# Clean Water Program

The Ecology Action Center promotes clean water protection and watershed awareness through education and outreach programs.

## Yard Smart

The Ecology Action Center's Yard Smart Program is a voluntary effort to reduce synthetic pesticide use, conserve natural resources, and encourage wildlife habitat. The EAC educates community members of Yard Smart principles, including practices that are safe for children, pets, and the environment.

The EAC hosted its 14th annual Yard Smart Garden Walk in June to draw attention to the Yard Smart program and highlight residential gardens and public spaces successfully implementing Yard Smart practices.

**Sixty community members participated** in the walk this year, which featured three residential gardens and one public site (more on page 18).



## Sugar Creek Stewards

In the Spring of 2016, the EAC launched the new Sugar Creek Stewards project designed to help combat invasive species along our local waterways, improving the health and appearance of Sugar Creek.

EAC staff trains and works alongside citizen volunteers on workdays held one Saturday a month. Priority worksites are designated by the Town of Normal and City of Bloomington.

The Sugar Creek Stewards project aims to raise awareness about the benefits Sugar Creek provides to the community and how proper storm water management and plant species management affects the health of the creek and therefore the community. Volunteers are taught about riparian habitats, identifying targeted invasive species and sustainable management, and identifying and promoting important native species.



## Sugar Creek & Constitution Trail Cleanup

Every year, EAC volunteers clean up Sugar Creek and the Constitution Trail from Titpon Trails to the Audubon Garden as part of **Bloomington-Normal Cleanup Week**.

**75**  
volunteers  
collected  
about 1 ton  
of trash

## Rain Barrel Workshops

The EAC offered **7 rain barrel workshops**, teaching attendees about the importance of water conservation and storm water runoff.

From these workshops, **35 rain catching devices were constructed**, including 55-gallon and 275-gallon rain barrels.



## Water Pollution Outreach

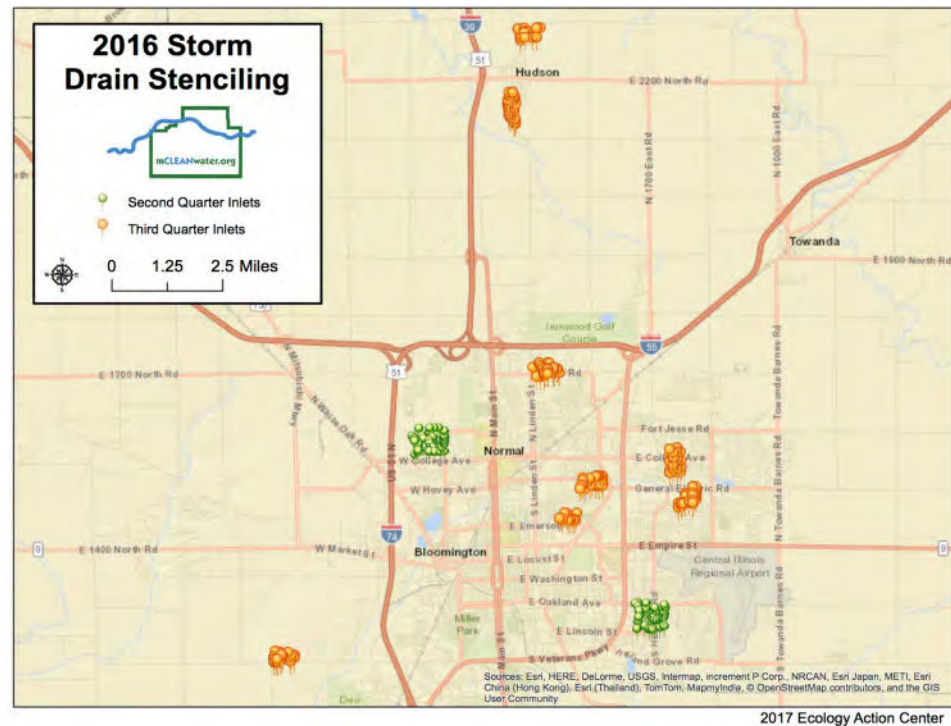
The EAC's storm water efforts focus on educating McLean County residents about harmful storm water pollution. As part of this effort, the EAC regularly coordinates storm water stenciling events, in which volunteers spray paint "Drain to Stream, Keep it Clean" reminders near storm drains (right). Leaves, litter, pesticides, and other chemicals from lawn are washed into waterways during storms.



Each year we recruit groups of volunteers to help with this project, which involves distributing information to homeowners and painting messages next to storm drains.

This year's volunteers included Heartland Community College students, Evan Junior High School students, incoming freshmen from Illinois Wesleyan University, 4H members, home-schooled students, Girl Scouts, Unit 5 High School seniors, a Unitarian Church Youth Group, and one very dedicated college professor who did his whole neighborhood single-handedly!

These **137 volunteers** shared the important information they learned with **2,446 households** and painted pollution prevention message next to **506 storm drains** in Bloomington, Normal, and Hudson.



Another large part of this effort involves teaching dozens of 3rd-grade classes about ways to prevent storm water runoff pollution. **1,765 students** learned this lesson in 2016.

## Radon Awareness


The Ecology Action Center's Radon Awareness Program is designed to increase public awareness about the dangers of radon—a radioactive, colorless, and odorless gas—in single- and multi-family homes. Exposure to radon over time can cause damage to lung tissue and lead to lung cancer.

The Radon Awareness Program provides residents with the tools needed to identify the gas' presence. The program is funded by the State Indoor Radon Grant, which is administered by the Illinois Emergency Management Agency.

The EAC offers information about radon on its website, as well as hosts booths at public events like the annual Home Show and the Expo, runs ads in The Pantagraph, and maintains an informational display in the EAC.

McLean County has the highest percentage of homes tested for radon in the state of Illinois.

 **ECOLOGY**  
ACTION CENTER  
RADON AWARENESS PROGRAM  
**2016 OUTREACH**

 **416**  
Phone calls received

**156**   
Visitors assisted

 **154**  
Test kits sold

**1,272**   
Website views

### Ruth Ann Lipic



The Ecology Action Center congratulates Ruth Ann Lipic on her retirement and expresses gratitude at her lifetime of service to our community, which has improved the quality of life and public health for thousands of people.

For the past **6 years**, she has served as Radon Program Coordinator at the EAC and has promoted countywide radon risk awareness events that led to over 40% of McLean County homes being tested.



# Energy Bright Program

# Solar Bloomington-Normal

BN Energy Bright is a community energy program designed to increase energy efficiency for homes and businesses in Bloomington-Normal through educational information, professional low-cost energy audits and personalized audit reports for participants.

The program is in partnership with the Town of Normal and the City of Bloomington, in conjunction with the municipal aggregation programs, to help further reduce the community's overall energy demand.



## Top 5 Energy Efficiency Tips

1

Swap out those bulbs! LEDs use 75% less energy and last 25 times longer than incandescent. Changing one incandescent to an LED can save you hundreds of dollars over the bulb's life.

2

Set your hot water heater to no higher than 120° and save 15% on your water-heating energy.

3

Install a programmable thermostat and use moderate home and away settings. You can save 10% a year on heating and cooling by turning your thermostat down 7-10°F for 8 hours a day.

4

Unplug electronic items when not in use to prevent phantom loads. Phantom loads waste \$3 million annually!

5

Put your computer and monitor on the active power management mode and save up to \$55 per monitor and \$45 per computer annually.

**Bonus Tip:** Sign up for a low-cost energy audit from the EAC!



In 2016, we conducted **71 home energy audits** and **5 business energy audits**.

Through our informational booths and educational presentations, we reached over **4,000 residents!**

## Solar Energy

The EAC helped increase solar capacity in Bloomington-Normal and McLean County by **432kW in 2016** through new solar arrays at **29 different homes and businesses** throughout the community.

The EAC leveraged our existing energy program to collaborate with the Midwest Renewable Energy Association in a solar bulk-purchasing program for McLean County called Solar Bloomington-Normal. The program ran from April through September.



The EAC shared information about the benefits of going solar and the cost savings available in the bulk-purchasing program to over **270 community members** at **25 free educational presentations**, resulting in 432kW of solar capacity at 29 homes and businesses.

## 14th Annual Yard Smart Garden Walk

2016 marked the 14th annual Yard Smart Garden Walk. **Sixty community members** participated in the walk.

The residential sites at the homes of Sharon and Doug Welch, Nancy and Joe Armstrong, and Jeff Overright were all featured on Yard Smart walks in the past. This allowed attendees to revisit these gardens and see how they have expanded and thrived over the years using environmentally friendly garden care practices and the incorporation of native species and wildlife areas.



The public site along the Constitution Trail highlighted the EAC's new Sugar Creek Stewards Project. After the garden tours, attendees gathered for a low-waste lunch and a presentation about invasive plant management and the EAC's new Sugar Creek Stewards project.

The event also featured a free-cycle table where attendees bring and trade gardening tools and plants. EAC raffled off home counter-top compost bins and compost bin and rain barrel workshop gift certificates to attendees

## Sustainable Living & Wellness Expo



The Illinois Sustainable Living and Wellness Expo, hosted by the Ecology Action Center and the Illinois Wesleyan University Wellness Program, celebrated its twelfth year in 2016. The Expo highlights the individuals and organizations in Illinois working to make our state a healthier more sustainable place to live. **Over 3,000 attendees** came to learn from and interact with 100 different exhibitors providing information about a myriad of topics including renewable energy, local food, and fitness.

This year's expo also featured cooking demonstrations by Epiphany Farms' chefs, a panel discussion about climate change hosted by and aired on WGLT, a bike repair station, live music, an EV car display, and much more.

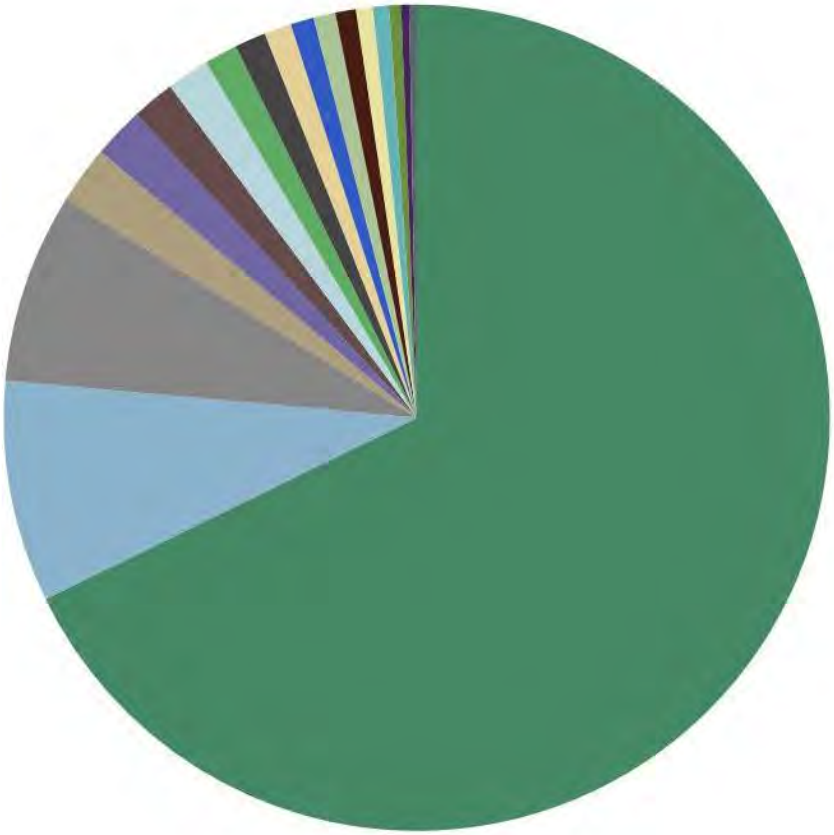
## America Recycles Day

### Items collected from 415 households:

- 5,000 pounds of electronics
- 2,400 pounds of textiles
- 203 pairs of eyeglasses
- 128 pounds of Christmas lights
- 58 pounds of ink cartridges
- 12 mattresses
- 10 pounds of corks
- 3 packed Prius loads of plastic bags



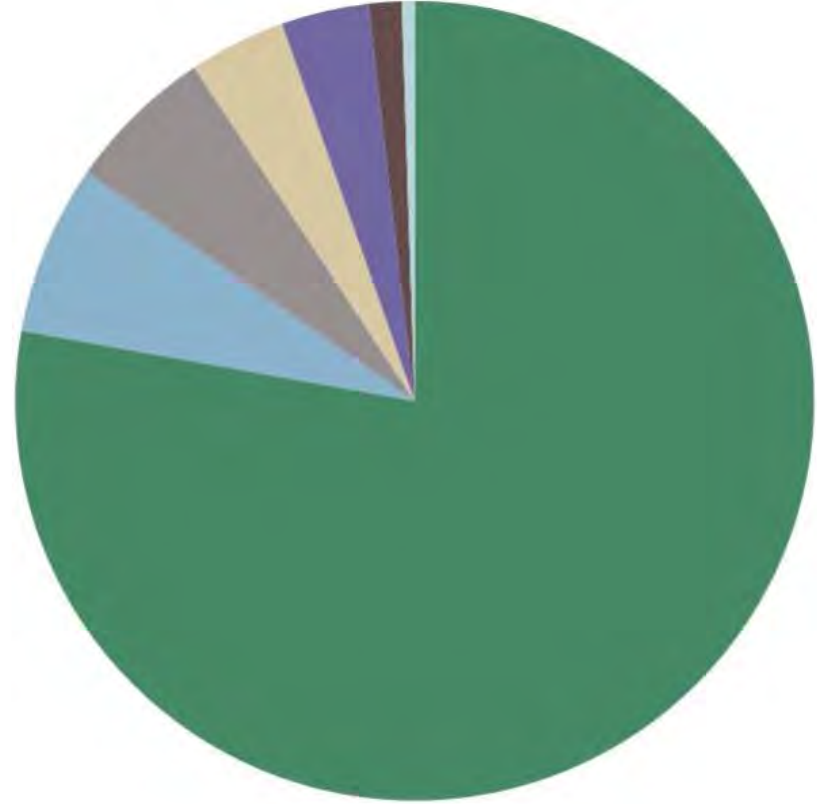
# 2016 Financial Summary: Expenses



- Payroll (67.77%) ■ Marketing (8.66%) ■ Supplies (7.45%) ■ Utilities (2.25%) ■ Printing & Reproduction (1.99%)
- Web/IT Services (1.69%) ■ Insurance (1.67%) ■ Recycling (1.30%) ■ Conference & Training (1.22%) ■ Miscellaneous (1.07%)
- Professional Fees (0.91%) ■ Office Equipment (0.86%) ■ Dues & Subscriptions (0.81%) ■ Merchandise (0.66%) ■ Travel (0.63%)
- Property Maintenance (0.46%) ■ Postage & Delivery (0.31%) ■ Transaction Fees (0.29%)

Total Expenses for 2016: \$286,216.39

# 2016 Financial Summary: Revenue



- Program Fees (77.81%) ■ Grants (6.88%) ■ Contributions (6%) ■ Fundraiser proceeds (3.91%) ■ Sponsorships (3.54%)
- Merchandise/Food Sales (1.33%) ■ Recycled Commodities (0.51%)

Total Revenue for 2016: \$347,968.03

# 2016 Sponsors & Contributors

## Public Agencies

- Town of Normal
- City of Bloomington
- McLean County
- Bloomington Normal Water Reclamation District
- Illinois Emergency Management Agency

## Business Supporters

- Midwest Fiber
- Green Top Grocery Cooperative
- EDP Renewables
- State Farm Insurance
- Republic Services
- SharePower Responsible Investing
- WJBC
- Half Hazard Press
- Invenergy
- Straightup Solar
- O'Brien Mitsubishi
- Destihl Brewery
- Zimmerman & Armstrong
- Mueller, Reece, & Hinch LLC
- Berkshire Hathaway – Jill West
- Marriott Hotel
- Dr. Matt Fraker & Dr. Sherri Thornton
- Brown's Produce
- Carroll's Timber Edge Farm
- Catalpa Grove Farm
- The Garlic Press
- Jane's Farm
- The Olive Bin
- PrairiErth Farm
- Kern Mattress Outlet

## Nonprofit Sponsors & Partners

- WGLT
- Bike BloNo
- Midwest Renewable Energy Association
- Home Sweet Home Ministries
- Mid Central Community Action
- American Chemical Society
- Illinois Prairie Wild Ones
- Sugar Grove Nature Center
- Friends of EverBloom
- Illinois Product Stewardship Alliance
- Illinois Recycling Association
- Illinois Counties Solid Waste Management Association
- Solid Waste Association of North America
- Illinois Environmental Council
- ParkLands Foundation
- Illinois Green Economy Network
- Normal Lions Club

## Institutional & Governmental Partners

- Illinois State University
- Illinois Wesleyan University
- McLean County Regional Planning Commission
- McLean County Health Department
- University of Illinois Extension

# Ecology Action Center Staff



**Michael Brown**  
Executive Director



**Kris Hall**  
Education Coordinator



**Larissa Armstrong**  
Program Coordinator



**Gary Kamplain**  
Program Assistant



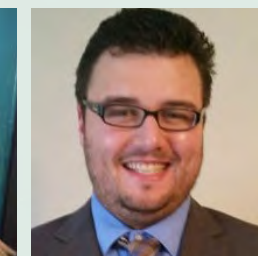
**Marcus Riici**  
Stewardship Coordinator



**Melanie Ziomek**  
Executive Assistant



**Lacey Monterastelli**  
Program Coordinator



**Glen Wetterow**  
Program Assistant

Report designed by Caitlin Perry

## 2016-2017 Board of Directors

Tim Golliday | President  
Nancy Armstrong | Past President  
Carl Teichman | Vice President  
Adrienne Ohler | Treasurer  
Charles Bristow | Secretary  
Wayne Aldrich | Ex-Officio Normal

Steve Arney | Ex-Officio Bloomington  
George Gordon | Ex-Officio McLean County  
Myra Gordon  
Charlotte Brown  
Kari Sandhaas  
Laurine Brown

Carlo Robustelli  
Missy Nergard  
Mauricio Sadicoff  
Mike O'Grady  
Michael Gorman

## Contact Us

202 W. College Avenue  
Normal, Illinois 61761



309.454.3169  
ecologyactioncenter.org