

April is Hazardous Materials Awareness Month

Edited By **TODD MARVER**
Enquirer-Democrat Reporter

Residents may not always know what chemicals are used in their community or how to interpret the safety codes posted on certain buildings. That's why agencies including the Illinois Emergency Management Agency and Office of Homeland Security (IEMA OHS), Illinois Department of Labor, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, the Illinois Fire Service Institute (ISFI), and local fire and emergency management partners monitor and manage this critical information.

These subject matter experts know what materials are considered hazardous, providing advice to businesses and others on hazardous material safety, and provides a system for reporting spills or other potentially dangerous releases.

This Hazardous Materials Safety Month, IEMA-OHS hopes everyone takes some time to learn about potential hazards in their communities. "Being

proactive and safety conscious is key," said IEMA-OHS Acting Director Theodore (Ted) Berger. "Each year, facilities that store certain hazardous chemicals are required to report their inventories to the State. These reports help ensure that emergency planners and first responders have the information they need to protect their communities."

IEMA-OHS coordinates shared efforts with ISFI to provide guidance and hazardous materials training, with updates every four years or sooner as needed. Federal funds are used to provide hazardous materials training to first responders in the State of Illinois, including public employees who may come across hazardous materials during their workday.

"Illinois has just under 9200 active Tier II chemical facilities," explained IEMA-OHS Hazardous Materials Section Supervisor David Martin. "When properly managed and stored, these chemicals can be used safely and utilized by re-

sponsible parties. The State of Illinois has proactive and well-trained regional and local responders, which reduces risk."

The federal Emergency Planning and Community Right-To-Know Act (EPCRA) mandates that each state designate a State Emergency Response Commission (SERC) to implement the requirements of the act. Under the Illinois EPCRA, IEMA-OHS is designated as the SERC.

As such, IEMA-OHS works closely with Local Emergency Planning Committees, first responders, and emergency managers to ensure local communities have knowledge and access to information about certain types of hazardous materials located within their communities and are prepared in the event of chemical release.

Disaster preparedness information is readily available from IEMA-OHS on the Ready Illinois website, a one-stop resource for detailed information about what to do before, during, and after disasters.

Giannoulas Secures Nearly \$950,000 for Illinois Investors in a \$19 Million Settlement

Five Broker-Dealers Charged Unreasonable Commissions on Small-Dollar Trades

Illinois Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulas announced nearly \$950,000 will be returned to Illinois investors as part of a \$19 million multi-state settlement involving five major brokerage firms accused of charging unfair fees on small stock trades.

The firms – Edward Jones, LPL Financial, RBC, Stifel and TD Ameritrade – were found by regulators in multiple states to have charged unreasonably high commissions on small-dollar trades during a five-year period, hurting everyday investors. The settlement was part of a broader enforcement action coordinated through the North American Securities Administrators Association's (NASAA) Broker-Dealer Section, which included assistance from the Illinois Secretary of State's Securities Division.

"These settlements send a strong message that financial firms must treat investors fairly and follow the law," Giannoulas said. "Small Illinois investors should not lose large shares of money because of unfair fees that can take a significant bite out of their investments and savings. Our office remains committed to protecting Illinois investors and holding firms accountable when they violate securities laws."

As part of the Illinois settlements, the firms must: return money to impacted Illinois investors; stop their improper fee practices; and pay \$175,000 in fines to the state. In total, Illinois investors will receive at least \$948,551.

Affected Illinois investors will be notified directly by mail by the brokerage firms before

payments are issued. Under the terms of the settlements, restitution is expected to be distributed on a rolling basis this spring and summer.

• **Edward Jones** will provide \$654,428.95 in restitution to Illinois clients and pay a \$100,000 fine to the department. Regulators found the firm charged unreasonable commissions on approximately 781,240 equity transactions nationwide totaling \$11,287,504 from May 1, 2020 to April 30, 2025. Of those, 45,228 transactions involved Illinois residents. Edward Jones customers are expected to receive restitution within 180 days of the February 20, 2026 order.

• **Stifel** will provide \$39,705.79 in restitution to Illinois clients and pay a \$20,000 fine to the department. The firm charged unreasonable commissions on approximately 45,352 equity transactions nationwide over a five-year period, including 2,078 transactions involving Illinois residents. Stifel customers were due to receive restitution within 60 days of the October 21, 2025 order.

• **LPL Financial** will provide \$124,665.76 in restitution to Illinois clients and pay a \$20,000 fine to the department. Regulators found the firm charged unreasonable commissions on approximately 127,527 equity transactions nationwide from March 20, 2020 to March 20, 2025, including 3,534 transactions involving Illinois residents. LPL Financial customers within 60 days of the March 13, 2026 order.

• **RBC** will provide \$99,264.25 in restitution to Illinois clients and pay a \$20,000 fine to the department. The firm charged unreasonable commissions on approximately 89,900 transactions nationwide over a five-year period, including 26,621 transactions involving Illinois residents. RBC cus-

tomers will first receive notice within 45 days of the March 30, 2026 order, with payments due within 30 days after that.

• **TD Ameritrade** will provide \$30,486.68 in restitution to Illinois clients and pay a \$15,000 fine to the department. Regulators found the firm charged unreasonable commissions on approximately 84,618 transactions nationwide from June 30, 2018 to June 30, 2023, including 2,325 transactions involving Illinois residents. TD Ameritrade customers within 120 days of the March 20, 2026 order.

In most cases, firms are expected to mail notification letters about a week before restitution checks are sent. If a notification letter or payment is returned as undeliverable, the firm must notify the Illinois Secretary of State's Securities Department and make a second attempt if an updated address is available. If no valid address can be confirmed, the funds will be transferred to the Illinois State Treasurer's Unclaimed Property Division.

Small investors, or retail investors, are individual, non-professional investors who buy and sell securities, mutual funds and exchange-traded funds through brokerage accounts, often through small-dollar transactions. Regulators found that excessive commissions on those trades disproportionately harmed smaller investors.

Giannoulas encouraged investors with questions or concerns about their investments or financial professionals to contact the Illinois Secretary of State Securities Department at (800) 628-7937. The Securities Department licenses and regulates financial services in Illinois and works to ensure compliance with state securities laws. Additional information about the Securities Department is available at www.ilsos.gov.

Southern Illinois Builders Association Joins National Construction Safety Week 2026: "All in Together"

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Enquirer-Democrat Reporter

The Southern Illinois Builders Association (SIBA) proudly supports Construction Safety Week 2026, scheduled for May 4-8, under the national theme "All in Together." This year's campaign emphasizes three key pillars of Recognize-Respond-Respect as a unified call to action for addressing high-energy, high-hazard work and preventing serious injuries and fatalities (SIFs) in the construction industry.

Construction Safety Week originated in 2014 when more than 40 national and global firms from the Construction Industry Safety Initiative Group (CISIG) and the Incident and Injury Free (IIF) CEO Forum joined forces to inspire safety leadership across the industry. It evolved into an annual campaign in 2016 and continues to grow as a vi-

tal opportunity for the entire construction community.

The mission of Construction Safety Week is to celebrate the dedication of workers and organizations that champion safety, boost daily commitment to safe practices among skilled craft professionals, project leaders, and business leaders, encourage collaboration and the sharing of best practices to strengthen the industry's safety culture, provide essential resources so every worker is mentally and physically prepared for the job, and promote ongoing safety awareness and education at job sites throughout the year.

"The construction industry continues to be one of the most impacted by serious injuries and fatalities," said Donna Richter, CEO of the Southern Illinois Builders Association. "We are committed to supporting our members and their teams in building

a strong safety culture right here in Southern Illinois. We encourage every contractor, craft professional, and leader to fully participate during the week of May 4-8 and carry these principles forward every day on every job site."

The 2026 National Fall Stand Down will once again coincide with Construction Safety Week. Companies and employees are strongly encouraged to pause during the week to discuss fall-related hazards, their serious consequences, and practical steps to prevent falls, one of the leading causes of injuries and fatalities in construction.

SIBA invites all member companies, contractors, and construction professionals across Southern Illinois to actively participate in Construction Safety Week activities, share best practices, and reinforce their commitment to sending every worker home safely each day.

Plenty of Reason to Celebrate Teacher Appreciation Week at Illinois State

By **TOM EMERY**
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May 4-8 is Teacher Appreciation Week, a time to recognize the caring, dedicated professionals in the vital field of education. There is plenty of reason to celebrate at Illinois State.

Founded as the state's first public institution of higher learning in 1857, ISU was a "normal school," a term for teacher training. That was the mission of the university for its first 108 years of existence until October 1965, when the Illinois Board of Higher Education authorized academic programs that did not require teacher certification. The new academic programs became effective in September 1966.

The excellence of Illinois State in producing top teaching professionals was evident early on. At the university's 25th anniversary celebration in 1882, 968 former ISU students were teaching in 88 of the 102 counties of Illinois. Another 104 held

teaching positions in seventeen other states and territories.

By the time ISU turned fifty in 1907, some ninety-one graduates were either presidents or professors in other normal universities.

That same year, ISU graduates had written or published 112 volumes, mainly texts, some of which had become standards in the field. Those numbers would grow exponentially in the century that followed.

Today, Illinois State remains a national leader in the field of education. The university was the second-largest producer of teachers in the United States from 2016-21, and was the nation's eighth-largest producer of elementary education majors in 2018.

Overall, one of six teachers in the state of Illinois hold a degree from ISU. At least one ISU graduate is employed in 87 percent of the public school districts in Illinois.

More ISU alums have earned National Board certification

than graduates of any other Midwestern university.

The longtime laboratory for education at Illinois State, University High School, was ranked by U.S. News and World Report as one of the top 20 public high schools in the state. That source also listed Thomas Metcalf School as among the top 8% in elementary schools in Illinois, as well as the top 3% for the state's middle schools.

One top source, College Factual, has rated ISU as the top school for special education in both the state and the nation.

Some 62,000 alumni of the education department at Illinois State now live and work in all 50 states, as well as 69 countries worldwide. It's part the indelible impact of teachers from Illinois State, from the smallest villages to the largest cities around the globe.

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IDNR upgrading campsite reservation system to better serve the public

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Reservations for campsites and shelters at Illinois state parks and historic sites will transition to an updated platform beginning May 1, offering park users a more user-friendly system for making reservations and securing permits.

Users will continue to use exploremoreil.com – the customer service platform of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources – to make campsite and shelter reservations, but they will notice an improved interface.

To accommodate the transition, electronic reservations will be unavailable April 27-30. Although the system will not be available to customers or staff during this timeframe, customers will be able to make walk-up reservations at campgrounds as availability allows.

Existing reservations for customers will automatically migrate to the new platform and will be required to use the same

email to access their reservations. All customers will need to create a new account and password in the new system.

One improvement in the new system is that picnic shelters will be available on a 12-month

rolling window; under the prior system, users had to wait until July 1 to make reservations for the upcoming year.

Existing customers should watch their inbox for an email from IDNR with further instructions.



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