

TexPIRG

Standing Up
To Powerful Interests

2018 Policy Agenda

Texas Public Interest Research Group

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TexPIRG is a consumer group that stands up to powerful interests whenever they threaten our health and safety, our financial security, or our right to fully participate in our democratic society.

For decades, we've stood up for consumers, countering the influence of big banks, insurers, chemical manufacturers and other powerful special interests.

Our team of researchers uncover the facts; our staff bring our findings to the public, through the media as well as one-on-one interactions; and our advocates are bringing the voice of the public to the halls of power on behalf of consumers.

TexPIRG's mission is to deliver consistent, result-oriented public interest activism that protects consumers, encourages a fair, sustainable economy, and fosters responsive, democratic government.

Harvey Response

After this devastating hurricane hit Texas, we educated victims on how to avoid price gouging, phone and internet scams, and dishonest insurance practices. We blew the whistle on flooded toxic waste sites and spoke out about the Arkema chemical plant explosion. We continue to focus on:

- Pushing for the immediate clean-up of at-risk toxic waste sites in the Houston area
- Educating the public about dangerous chemical facilities in their neighborhoods

Reclaiming our Democracy

The influence of wealthy special interests in the funding of elections has eroded public trust in our political system and helped to depress civic participation. TexPIRG is working to ensure that every citizen, regardless of wealth, has the opportunity to influence the actions of our government. We do this by:

- Empowering small donors to curb the effect of big money donations on elections
- Working for public-private matching programs that increase voter turnout and voter power

- Advocating for automatic voter registration, which can increase access to elections and ensure accurate and honest voter files
- Pushing for more representative districts by creating independent redistricting committees that can end the divisive and partisan effects of gerrymandering

21st Century Transportation

Our transportation system should include and support a variety of ways to travel within our cities and around our state, and to do so with less congestion and pollution. Transportation funding should be focused on fixing existing roads and bridges, and on making it easier for people to travel by public transit, biking and walking. We advocate for:

- Electrifying our cities' police cars, school busses, and transit busses
- Using the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity provided by the Volkswagen emissions infractions settlement to build a viable network of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations across the state
- Investing in smart developments and infrastructure that can empower Texans to travel by rail, bus, bike, and on foot

(Continue on reverse)

Clean, Efficient Energy Use

Texas' reliance on pollution-causing fossil fuels is putting our health and safety at risk. The growth of cleaner energy technologies in Texas benefits both our environment and our economy. TexPIRG is working to increase clean and efficient energy use by:

- Protecting solar energy consumers from discriminatory pricing schemes and demand charges
- Fighting back against local utility? attacks on net metering, which would devalue solar energy below the benefit it provides to the community, our grid, and the planet's climate

Stopping the Overuse of Antibiotics

At least 23,000 Americans die every year from antibiotic-resistant infections, and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention warns that the widespread overuse of antibiotics on factory farms is unnecessary, inappropriate, and makes everyone less safe. TexPIRG is working to protect the effectiveness of our medicines by:

- Releasing our Chain Reaction 3 Report, which graded the top 25 restaurant chains in our country on their antibiotics policies
- Educating the public about the problem of antibiotics overuse through media outreach and opinion editorial publications
- Building a Health Professionals Action Network of involved health professionals to continue our advocacy work to public health officials and restaurant chains

Consumer Protection

Consumers should be able to buy products on the marketplace without concern about hidden fees, scams, safety risks, or privacy violations. TexPIRG is working to protect consumers by:

- Advocating for free credit freezes after a security breach at credit bureau Experian not Equifax? put sensitive information of 140 million Americans at risk

- Defending the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau from attacks by Wall Street financial institutions and their allies in Congress
- Strengthening consumer privacy protections against abuses by big data corporations

Lead-Free Drinking Water

Lead is a potent neurotoxin that affects how our children develop, learn, and behave. Yet across the country, thousands of tests are showing lead in the drinking water at schools, pre-schools, and child care centers. TexPIRG is working to get the lead out of water, with a focus on schools and early childhood programs, by:

- Successfully gaining a commitment from AISD spell out AISD? to install filters on water fountains to protect against lead
- Studying the pervasiveness of lead contamination in Texas' schools, and making that information available to the public
- Creating an advocacy tool-kit for parents and teachers to help them make change happen in their local district

Protecting the Public from Toxic Chemicals

Companies are allowed to put almost any chemical they want into the products we use every day, even though the government isn't testing these chemicals for safety and doesn't require pre-market approval. As a result, small amounts of chemicals of concern have become far too common in many products, such as formaldehyde in baby shampoo and phthalates in cosmetics. TexPIRG is working to reduce human exposure to toxic chemicals in consumer products by:

- Releasing our annual Toy Safety report that lets parents know which toys are safe for their kids and which to avoid
- Testing widely used cosmetic products for contaminants like lead and parabens and blowing the whistle on companies that use these chemicals