

ConnPIRG



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More states, communities and businesses are getting rid of plastic bags, foam containers and other plastic “stuff” we can live without.

BEYOND PLASTIC

Bags, foam and packaging: Moving beyond single-use plastic

Written by Matt Casale, director of PIRG’s national environmental campaigns

In the 1970s, Coke and Pepsi began what would become a landmark shift in their operations: They started producing more plastic bottles and fewer glass ones.

We’re all familiar with what happened next: Countless consumer products, from groceries to shopping bags to take-out containers to online shopping deliveries, have adopted plastic for their packaging over other materials. But plastic is far harder to recycle than glass, aluminum or paper—and it sticks around in the environment for hundreds of years.

Of the 9 billion tons of plastic produced in the world since the 1950s, 7 billion tons of it have ended up as trash.

So what can we do, now, in 2022, to turn the tide on plastic pollution? Well, if your bathtub

is overflowing, the first thing you do is turn off the tap. Here’s a deeper look at PIRG’s work—work we couldn’t do without your support—to combat our country’s “throwaway” culture and eliminate the single-use plastic “stuff” we can all live without.

Banning the bag

In 2010, California PIRG (CALPIRG) endorsed statewide legislation that would ban one of the worst contributors to plastic pollution: single-use plastic grocery bags. Initially, the bag ban bill stalled in the Legislature. But a funny thing happened as plastics industry lobbyists focused their attention on state lawmakers in Sacramento: PIRG organizers and canvasser helped convince towns, cities and counties to ban the bag.



ConnPIRG and The Public Interest Network are celebrating 50 years of action for a change.

FALL 2022

PLASTIC-FREE FUTURE: CONT.



Maryland PIRG State Director Emily Scarr joins allies to call on Gov. Larry Hogan to ban polystyrene containers in Maryland in 2019.

By 2014, at least 140 California counties, cities and towns had done so, representing a third of the state's population. The combination of strong local support and weakened industry opposition proved unbeatable, and that same year, the nation's first statewide bag ban became law. In the years since, 10 other states, including Connecticut, have followed suit.

Going foam-free

A few years later and three thousand miles away, PIRG staff in Maryland targeted an equally pervasive and harmful form of plastic waste: polystyrene foam. It keeps our coffee hot and our take-out fresh, but it also persists in our environment for hundreds of years.

PIRG organizers worked with legislators, environmental groups, students, activists and community organizations to win the nation's first statewide ban on single-use polystyrene products in March 2019.

With seven more states joining Maryland in banning foam in just the last three years, zero waste advocates like you and me can now boast an impressive statistic showing just how far the movement has come: Today, 1 out of 3 of Americans lives in a state with a robust ban on some type of single-use plastics.

What's next?

In 2022, a grocery trip or package delivery shouldn't come with a mountain of single-use plastic packaging waste. But corporations like Whole Foods and Amazon often make single-use plastic all but unavoidable—which is

why we're working to get these and other big industry players to start doing their part to combat plastic waste.

We're also building a steady drumbeat of momentum for legislation that would put more of the financial responsibility for plastic waste management onto the plastic producers themselves. And across the country, PIRG canvassers have been knocking on more than 50,000 doors, talking to supporters like you who have helped call for reduction in plastics use.

There's still a lot more work to be done—especially given the recent rise of new industry tactics to keep Americans hooked on single-use plastic, such as the process deceptively termed "chemical recycling" that's really just burning plastic to make dirty fuels.

But the progress we've made gives us hope that, together with supporters like you, we can achieve a future where nothing that we use for five minutes is allowed to pollute our environment for hundreds of years.

NEWS BRIEFS

CONSUMER WATCHDOG

After PIRG advocacy, Department of Transportation cracks down on exploitative airline fees

The Department of Transportation (DOT) is telling airlines to stop charging parents extra to sit next to their children.

On July 8, the DOT called on airlines to eliminate fees to seat children under 13 with an accompanying adult. The agency also warned that it will crack down on other consumer-unfriendly fees and published its first "Bill of Rights" to help passengers with disabilities. These actions came a week after our national partner U.S. PIRG and other consumer advocacy groups sent a letter urging Congress to tell airlines to prioritize passengers in their policies.

"We are encouraged that the DOT finally seems poised to take the gloves off and stick up for flyers whose rights have been abused for way too long," said Teresa Murray, consumer watchdog with PIRG.

OUR MISSION

When consumers are cheated or the voices of ordinary citizens are drowned out by special interest lobbyists, PIRG speaks up and takes action. We uncover threats to public health and well-being and fight to end them, using the time-tested tools of investigative research, media exposes, grassroots organizing, advocacy and litigation. PIRG's mission is to deliver persistent, results oriented public interest activism that protects consumers, encourages a fair, sustainable economy and fosters responsive democratic government.

NEWS BRIEFS

The DOT also plans to announce additional protections this year concerning two other issues PIRG has raised: refunds for canceled flights and unreasonable fees for bags, flight changes and other basic services.

ZERO OUT TOXICS

Thousands urge Columbia Sportswear to stop use of toxic PFAS chemicals

Nearly 50,000 people have spoken: Toxic chemicals have no place in our clothing.

On July 7, our national research partner U.S. PIRG Education Fund and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) delivered a petition with more than 48,000 signatures to Columbia Sportswear's flagship store in Portland, Oregon, urging the company to phase out the use of toxic PFAS (or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) in its products. PFAS—which are used to make gear more stain- and water-resistant and have been linked to cancer and other serious health issues—enter our environment at every stage of the manufacture, use and disposal of products treated with them.

Columbia's CEO has said that the company is focused on phasing out PFAS use, but the company has not set a public timeline to fully eliminate PFAS from its supply chain.

"PFAS do not belong anywhere near our bodies, let alone in the clothing and gear we wear and use every day," said Emily Rogers, Zero Out Toxics advocate for U.S. PIRG Education Fund. "While we are glad to hear that the company is working on phasing out PFAS behind the scenes, we urge Columbia Sportswear to make a public commitment to phase out these toxic 'forever chemicals' in its products by 2024."

RIGHT TO REPAIR

Google reverses anti-repair position, announces improved repair access for smartphones

After our experts gave Google a "D+" on the repairability of its smartphones, the tech giant is now finally taking steps to improve repair access for customers and independent repair shops.



On April 8, Google announced that it will allow new user repair access for its Pixel line of smartphones. The commitment marks a major reversal in Google's policy, which has historically been hostile to Right to Repair. A PIRG-backed shareholder resolution, calling for increased repair access, was filed with Google back in January.

"First Microsoft, then Apple, and now Google—in just the past year, three major tech manufacturers have admitted that user repair won't cause the sky to fall," said U.S. PIRG Education Fund Senior Right to Repair Campaign Director Nathan Proctor.

"It's becoming more and more clear that every company could facilitate a more open environment for repair."

On July 7, U.S. PIRG Education Fund and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) delivered more than 48,000 petition signatures to Columbia Sportswear, calling for the company to phase out toxic PFAS from its supply chain by 2024. PIRG Zero Out Toxics Advocate Emily Rogers held a press conference outside the company's flagship store in downtown Portland, Ore.

GO PAPERLESS!

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For more information call 1-800-841-7299 or send an email to: plannedgiving@connpirg.org

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CITIZEN AGENDA • FALL 2022

50 YEARS

ConnPIRG and our national network are celebrating 50 years of action for a change. The Public Interest Network operates and supports organizations committed to a shared vision of a better world and a strategic approach to social change.

CLIMATE

How a \$369 billion investment will help protect our climate

Midway through a summer of brutally hot weather, Congress passed the nation's largest-ever climate and clean energy investments.

The Inflation Reduction Act, signed into law by President Joe Biden on Aug. 17, includes a \$369 billion investment to reduce global warming pollution by 40% by 2030. The law provides up to \$7,500 in tax credits if you want to buy a new electric vehicle; extends tax credits for rooftop solar and energy-efficient homes and buildings; and includes \$3 billion for electric U.S. Postal Service trucks.

"This is a big deal," said PIRG Environment Campaigns Director Matt Casale. "Not everything in the bill is perfect, but the clean energy tax credits in par-



Led by Environment Campaigns Director Matt Casale, PIRG has worked for years to promote climate and clean air solutions such as all-electric school and transit buses.

ticular will inject a jolt of (renewable) energy into state and local efforts to reduce harmful emissions."

PIRG's success winning similar policies at the state and local levels helped pave the way for these historic investments.

FEATURED STAFF



Faye Park: As president of the PIRG network, Faye oversees our national campaigns to protect consumers and enable Americans to lead healthier, safer, more secure lives. Faye began her public interest career as a student volunteer with MASSPIRG Students at Williams College, and then later worked with the Student PIRGs in California on campaigns to promote recycling and to help students register to vote.

Credit: Kimball Nelson

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