

**RIGHT
TO REPAIR**

Bloomberg



Nathan Proctor
U.S. PIRG
CAMPAIGN FOR THE RIGHT
TO REPAIR SENIOR DIRECTOR

**MICROSOFT WILL ALLOW MORE REPAIR
SHOPS AFTER ACTIVIST PROTESTS**

NCPPIRG



NEW FEDERAL BAN ON SURPRISE MEDICAL BILLS
PATRICIA KELMAR
U.S. PIRG
Health Care Campaigns Director



2021 ANNUAL REPORT

To our members and supporters

Fifty years ago, concerned college students wanted to make a difference on social problems ranging from pollution to political corruption. They came together to form the first Public Interest Research Groups.

In the decades that followed, NCPIRG invited the broader community to join our cause. Together, these concerned students and the citizens who joined them grew into a force that has defended the public interest in countless efforts toward a cleaner environment, safer products and healthier lives. Whether you've been with us for decades or a few months, thank you for making this work possible.

In 2021, NCPIRG members, staff and allies continued to add to our legacy of positive change. For example:

- *Our Right to Repair campaign prompted tech giants Apple and Microsoft to abandon their previous positions and make commitments to expand repair access for their devices. The White House got involved as well, issuing an executive order denouncing anti-repair corporate practices.*
- *We put a spotlight on Whole Foods, Amazon and other major users of plastic packaging to help curb America's plastic pollution crisis. Some 60,000 people raised their voices for a future where grocery and retail companies dramatically reduce the plastic waste they deliver into our lives.*
- *We supported federal infrastructure investments to transform our transportation systems, protect our communities from toxic pollution, and preserve a healthy climate for future generations.*

We can't predict what new challenges we'll face in the next 50 years. But North Carolinians will still need an advocate for the public good. Fact-driven, results-oriented action will still make a difference in the quality of our environment, our lives and those of our children.

Thank you, once again, for making all of this possible.

Katie Craig



Katie Craig
State Director, NCPIRG



NCPIRG 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.



PIRG's Nathan Proctor spoke with Bloomberg News about Microsoft's new commitment to Right to Repair, what it means for the fight against toxic e-waste, and the thousands of citizen advocates who helped make it happen.



Right to Repair Campaign Director Kevin O'Reilly (top left) hosted a webinar to discuss farmers' calls for reforms that would lower barriers to repair their tractors.

Right to Repair: Cutting e-waste and empowering consumers

Right to Repair doesn't just mean letting consumers fix their own stuff—it means helping our communities keep local repair shops in business, helping our families save money on their electronics, and helping reduce the electronic waste that's choking our planet. In 2021, PIRG helped make Right to Repair a federal priority and got major corporations to reconsider their unfair repair policies.

Apple, Microsoft agreed to make devices easier to repair

NOV. 20, 2021: If you're among those who don't want to add your broken iPhone to the 416,000 mobile phones Americans dispose of every day, we have good news.

Apple, once one of the most visible opponents of the Right to Repair movement, on Nov. 17 reversed its longstanding policy against making spare parts, repair instructions and repair software tools available to customers. The announcement came just days after the company pledged to stop deactivating Face ID for iPhone screens repaired independently, and it followed a similar commitment Microsoft made in October—marking a month of unprecedented progress for Right to Repair in the corporate sphere.

"This win was made possible by years of work on the part of Right to Repair advocates—including 33,000 messages sent in by PIRG sup-

porters urging Apple to end its unfair repair policies," said Nathan Proctor, senior director for PIRG's Right to Repair campaign.

Apple's commitment came on the same day as a key deadline in a PIRG-backed shareholder resolution that our partners filed with the company.

President Biden signed an executive order supporting Right to Repair

JULY 15, 2021: The right to repair our stuff—without having to pay an arm and a leg to the manufacturer—used to be the status quo. Now, thanks to a presidential executive order, Right to Repair is on its way back.

President Joe Biden's July 9 executive order called on the Federal Trade Commission to limit software locks on farm equipment and compelled the agency to prohibit "anti-competitive restrictions on using independent repair shops or DIY repairs of your own devices and equipment."

"In the span of a few years, PIRG, the independent repair hub Repair.org, and the online repair community iFixit have helped propel this campaign from online forums and local fix-it-yourself clinics to state legislatures—and now even the White House," said PIRG's Nathan Proctor. "Already, the majority of American people agree with us. Now, it appears, the president does as well." ■



In April, PIRG advocates joined state and federal lawmakers for “United States Against Plastic,” a virtual rally to promote efforts across the country aimed at getting rid of the single-use plastic products we just don’t need.

Another year of progress toward a zero-waste future

Every year, more Americans become fed up with our country’s throwaway culture, and every year, PIRG finds ways to channel that frustration into action. 2021 was no exception. More communities pushed for PIRG-backed bans on single-use plastic; more citizen advocates called on corporations to do their part to reduce waste; and more lawmakers pushed for systemic change to hold plastic producers accountable for the waste they create.

Citizens called on Whole Foods to move beyond plastic

JAN. 3, 2022: Actions speak louder than words. That’s the message PIRG and our supporters are sending to Whole Foods, the grocery giant that isn’t living up to its environmentally friendly reputation when it comes to plastic waste.

At the end of a year of organizing the public around moving Whole Foods beyond plastic, PIRG released a detailed list of 10 waste-slashing steps Whole Foods can take right now. Among the most effective (and most urgent) actions: eliminating plastic produce packaging and embracing reusable options.

“For the second year in a row, Whole Foods received a failing grade in a report of corporate policies to reduce plastic waste,” said Juliana Clejan, Zero Waste campaign associate for PIRG. “Over the past year, we’ve knocked on 24,000 doors and gathered almost 80,000 petition signatures from Whole Foods shoppers who want the store to eliminate single-use plastic packaging.”

“If and when Whole Foods steps up and heeds the public’s call for change, it will make a huge impact on our plastic waste crisis right now and encourage others in the industry to follow suit.”

Our research partners outlined 10 steps to create a zero-waste economy in America

OCT. 8, 2021: If we had better tools to combat our country's "throwaway" culture, would the average American still throw out 1,800 pounds of trash every year?

On Sept. 30, U.S. PIRG Education Fund, Frontier Group and Environment America Research & Policy Center released a report titled "Trash in America: Moving from destructive consumption towards a zero-waste system." It outlines 10 steps the U.S. needs to take to create a zero-waste economy—including universal, mandated composting, making all single-use plastic products recyclable, and encouraging businesses to use recycled materials in their products.

"We can do better than this—we just have to collectively make that choice," said Alex Truelove, U.S. PIRG Education Fund Zero Waste program director. "What gives me hope is that, despite the efforts by industry groups to keep people from reusing, America has already restored much of the momentum on waste reduction that we lost during the pandemic."

That will take systemic change—which is why PIRG continues to advocate for legislation that

holds plastic producers financially responsible for the waste their products become.

Our Waste is Out of Fashion campaign took on clothing waste

FEB. 3, 2021: Globally, the equivalent of one dump truck filled with clothing and other textiles is sent to a landfill or incinerator every second.

That's why NCPIRG and our national network launched Waste Is Out Of Fashion in January 2021, a new campaign to reduce clothing waste—starting with banning an industry practice called "overstock destruction" that's perpetuating the problem. Clothing companies commonly destroy, incinerate or landfill unsold and unused clothing—their overstock—to make way for new merchandise.

"Clothing manufacturers and retailers should not be overproducing clothing just to throw it out," said former PIRG Zero Waste Campaign Associate Olivia Sullivan. "That's why we need state governments to take action."

NCPIRG is calling on our governor to cut down clothing waste here in North Carolina by banning the destruction of overstock. ■



Composting and recycling should be mandatory, less expensive than garbage disposal and available everywhere there are trash services—at home, school, work and in public.



PIRG's Olivia Sullivan (top left) discusses textile waste with activists and journalists during a PIRG webinar.



Toxic waste sites tagged for cleanup by the federal Superfund program house “some of the most hazardous chemicals known to humankind.” The Superfund program protects people from these contaminants and the serious health problems associated with them.

Safeguarding our environment and health against toxic threats

For 50 years, PIRG staff and members have won laws and policies giving communities the right to know what chemicals were entering their air, water and land. Some of these chemicals pose significant, even fatal, health risks—so we’ve called on industries to reduce their use of toxic chemicals in favor of safer substitutes, and we’ve helped curb or outright ban the use of toxic substances that pose too great a risk for too little benefit. Building on this legacy, here’s some of the progress we were able to make in 2021:

Did you know the infrastructure bill makes polluters pay?

NOV. 20, 2021: More of the toxic waste sites deemed to be among the worst of the worst by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will soon see an influx of funding from a tax on polluting industries, which will help to speed up the cleanup of these hazardous sites.

The PIRG-backed bipartisan infrastructure package, signed into law by President Biden on Nov. 15, reinstates a tax on the production of hazardous chemicals to help fund the cleanup of toxic sites on the EPA’s National Priority List under its Superfund program. One in 6 Americans lives near a Superfund site.

“Since these taxes lapsed in 1995, the government lost billions in revenue from polluting industries—and had to rely increasingly on taxpayer revenue to cover the cost of cleanup,” said Jillian Gordner, PIRG Make Polluters Pay campaign associate.

“The reinstatement of the ‘polluter pays’ principle will reduce the risk of cancer and other serious illnesses for millions of Americans and give them safer communities to live in.”

Public outcry won action on toxic pesticides

AUG. 23, 2021: After PIRG and supporters like you spoke out, corporations and federal regulators alike are taking action to better protect Americans from two dangerous pesticides.

On Aug. 18, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced that it would ban the pesticide chlorpyrifos from use on food crops. Linked to brain damage in children, chlorpyrifos was banned for household use two decades ago—and now the EPA has finally moved to stop it from contaminating our food as well. PIRG and our coalition partners delivered more than 27,000 petition signatures calling on the EPA to ban chlorpyrifos.

And that's not all—2021 also saw Bayer announce plans to reformulate the consumer-use version of its toxic weed killer Roundup. Bayer said it will remove the herbicide's main active ingredient, glyphosate, which has been recognized as a probable human carcinogen since 2015.

Thousands of people have made legal claims that using Roundup caused their non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. And years of organizing, activism and public advocacy, fueled by members like you, helped make this progress possible.

Congress approved \$15 billion to get the lead out of America's drinking water

DEC. 1, 2021: For millions of Americans, lead-free drinking water is no longer a pipe dream.

After years of inaction, the bipartisan infrastructure bill will put unprecedented resources toward stopping lead from getting into our drinking water. The \$55 billion allocated in the bill for water infrastructure includes \$15 billion to remove lead pipes across the country and \$200 million to address lead in school drinking water, helping protect the estimated 24 million American children at risk of losing IQ points due to low-level lead exposure.

"This bill is both a crucial win for public health and a foundation for further progress," said Emily Rogers, PIRG Zero Out Toxics advocate. "Now let's start putting this money to work to make drinking water safer for our communities and our kids, even as we advocate for more resources to finish the job."

In addition to advocating for action at the federal level, the PIRG network has published dozens of reports, fact sheets, tip guides, policy recommendations and other resources aimed at getting the lead out of Americans' drinking water. ■



Farmer Susan Gordon speaks about her experience with a class of toxic chemicals called PFAS—which NCIPIRG is working to ban from use in consumer products such as food packaging.



In schools across the country, drinking water testing has revealed lead levels at hundreds or even thousands of times the limit recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics.



KEEPING YOU SAFE:
NEW TECHNOLOGY IS REDUCING ROBOCALLS



Throughout 2021, PIRG's Teresa Murray spoke with news outlets about new federal regulations aimed at protecting Americans from robocalls—and what consumers can do to protect themselves when those regulations fall short.

Consumer protection: Watchdogging the marketplace, advocating for the public

When consumers demand better—safer products, more truthful advertising, a fairer marketplace—it's the job of citizen groups like NCPIRG to make sure the public's voice is heard. From deceitful robocalls to pandemic-driven travel complications, consumer protection looks a lot different today than it did 50 years ago. But our mission remains the same: Watchdog the marketplace, alert Americans to potential threats, and organize around commonsense policies to mitigate those threats.

Make the ringing stop: Protecting you from robocalls

SEPT. 29, 2021: Those robocalls saying your car warranty is about to expire or that you owe back taxes to the IRS are as dangerous as they are annoying. That's why we're working to make the ringing stop.

On Sept. 22, our national research partner U.S. PIRG Education Fund released a report taking stock of the progress phone companies have made thus far toward squashing illegal robocalls. These scams cost Americans \$10 billion every year in fraud losses—and falling victim to one of them can result in irreparable damage to your financial future. And yet only a third of the largest phone companies had completely adopted anti-robocall technology.

“How much longer are we going to tolerate people's lives being destroyed when they fall for an imposter call that looks like it's coming from their bank or the IRS? This is inexcusable, it has to stop, and phone company compliance will make a big difference,” said Teresa Murray, consumer watchdog for U.S. PIRG Education Fund.

Teresa and our consumer watchdog team put together 18 tips to help you reduce robocalls and protect yourself and your loved ones from scams. Find the guide at ncpirg.org/robocalls.

The federal Consumer Bureau after 10 years: Successes, setbacks and a bright future

JULY 25, 2021: Imagine what could have been different if America had had a tough consumer cop on the Wall Street beat in the years before the Great Recession.

Fortunately for consumers, we now have the federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). To mark the bureau's 10th anniversary on July 21, we released a U.S. PIRG Education Fund report recapping the bureau's track record of helping consumers, as well as the steps currently underway to refocus the CFPB on its mission after four years of retrograde decisions under the Trump administration.

"Unscrupulous businesses drove millions of Americans down the road to financial ruin in the late 2000s. The creation of the CFPB soon afterward was a necessary—and hard-won—victory for consumers," said Mike Litt, U.S. PIRG Education Fund consumer campaigns director. "The CFPB has shown its value in its first 10 years of operation ... and resiliency in the face of efforts to defang its mission."

Thousands of canceled flights around Christmas highlighted PIRG's call for timely airline refunds

DEC. 30, 2021: Across four of the busiest days of the year for flyers, airline companies canceled more than 2,000 U.S. flights and delayed many more—underscoring NCPIRG's call for the companies to make it easier for consumers to secure the refunds they deserve.

A combination of severe winter weather, understaffing and the surging Omicron COVID-19 variant caused more than 8,000 flight cancellations worldwide between Dec. 24 and Dec. 27. The resulting uptick in consumer complaints about airline refunds is just one example of the problems analyzed in U.S. PIRG Education Fund's report "Not First Class."

"Despite the government giving the airline industry \$50 billion to save jobs and keep the industry afloat when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, service continues to be subpar," said Jacob van Cleef, Consumer Watchdog associate for our national network.

NCPIRG is calling on the U.S. Department of Transportation to crack down on the airlines to improve how they interact with their customers and refund people for the flights they could not have taken due to the pandemic. ■



During his tenure as the Consumer Bureau's first director from 2012 to 2017, Richard Cordray (left) worked with U.S. PIRG Senior Federal Consumer Program Director Ed Mierzwinski on a variety of consumer issues.



In November 2021, PIRG Consumer Watchdog Associate Hannah Rhodes discussed the findings of our 36th annual "Trouble in Toyland" report on dangerous children's products in testimony before members of the U.S. Senate.

NCPIRG

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Member Spotlight

None of our work would be possible without the support of our members. This year we're highlighting the story of one of our national network's members, in his own words.



John McLees

I first learned of PIRG in the early 1970s from a college roommate whose best friend was involved with PIRG.

I appreciate PIRG's focus on consumer protection, its strategic choice of issues to pursue, the foundation of its work on in-depth research, its willingness to confront entrenched corporate interests, and the effectiveness of its model of encouraging grassroots advocacy.

PIRG's campaigns for the Right to Repair, for improving the product recall system, for reducing plastic pollution and for smarter investments in our transportation infrastructure all reflect PIRG's smart, aggressive and persistent approach to advocating for the public interest. They are good reasons for all of us to support this work to the extent that we can.

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NCPIRG and our national network
are celebrating 50 years of action
for a change.

