

Illinois PIRG



PIRG's Lucas Gutterman releases the "Chromebook Churn" report in front of Google's offices last spring. Photo credit: Leise Jones Photography

RIGHT TO REPAIR

PIRG called for longer-lasting Chromebooks. Google listened.

On Sept. 14, Google Vice President John Solomon told PIRG's Lucas Gutterman that the tech giant would give Chromebooks currently in use 10 years of support. This victory came after months of our advocacy and campaigning to extend the life of these computers from an average of four years.

Many schools are buying way more laptops than they used to, to ensure that every student has a device to use in class and at home. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many schools provided their students with laptops, often low-cost Chromebooks.

It would be one thing if kids could use the same laptop for their entire education. But currently, Chromebooks have a built-in "death date." After as few as four years, Google stops updating the software—rendering the laptop useless.

U.S. PIRG Education Fund's "Chromebook Churn" report found that doubling the life of Chromebooks sold in just 2020 could cut carbon emissions equivalent to taking 900,000 cars off the road for a year, and result in \$1.8 billion in savings for schools, assuming no additional maintenance costs.

To stop this Chromebook churn, more than 10,000 PIRG members and supporters signed our petition, joining a coalition of nonprofits, parents and teachers asking Google for longer-lasting laptops.

"Google's decision is a victory for the parents, teachers, students and environmentalists who asked to extend the life of Chromebooks in response to our 'Chromebook Churn' report," said Lucas Gutterman, director of PIRG's Designed to Last campaign.

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

WINTER 2024

LONGER-LASTING CHROMEBOOKS CONT.



Thousands of PIRG supporters, teachers, PTAs and students called on Google for longer-lasting Chromebooks in schools. The tech giant listened.

“With a lifespan of 10 years, fewer working laptops will be disposed of because they’ve reached their ‘death date.’ Continuing improvements in technology mean products should last longer each year, and Google and other tech companies should continue to innovate ways to commit to a circular economy.”

Shareholder advocacy also convinced Google to change its practice

Green Century^o, founded by the PIRG network, also engaged Alphabet (Google’s parent company) and has been working on this issue for about six months.

“We believe this is a major win for the environment, schools and the shareholder advocacy process,” said Douglass Guernsey, a shareholder advocate at Green Century Capital Management.

“By extending the life of Chromebooks commonly used in schools, Alphabet is getting ahead of addressing potential risks and making sure hardware using its software can be used for as long as possible.”

Since 2021, Green Century has previously engaged Alphabet on improving reparability of its Pixel phones and disclosing details of the company’s carbon offsets. Both previous engagements resulted in changes from management to address environmental concerns.

Google and other tech companies should continue to find ways to stop the disposability treadmill that pressures us to replace our phones and laptops in favor of newer models.

With e-waste now the fastest-growing waste stream in the U.S., it’s not sustainable to consume technology at this rate.

Longer-lasting Chromebooks are a meaningful step toward the tech industry making products designed to last.

Tomorrow, we hope you’ll continue to support us in our campaign to stop e-waste. Today, let’s celebrate progress. The direct engagement of members like you gave us the resources and influence to win. Thank you.

^oGreen Century Capital Management, Inc. (Green Century) is the investment advisor to the Green Century Funds (the Funds).

NEWS BRIEFS

PESTICIDES

Illinoisans call for an end to destructive dicamba herbicide

PIRG mobilized hundreds of Illinoisans at Chicago farmers markets to send messages to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) urging the agency to stop allowing the use of a dangerous, drifting herbicide called dicamba. Our organizers also collected over a dozen photo petitions from market-goers to help raise visibility for the campaign.

Dicamba is an herbicide that is commonly used on genetically modified soy, corn and cotton. Even if applied according to the instructions on the label, dicamba easily drifts through the air and travels up to three miles away from where it was originally used. That drift can even happen days after the herbicide was sprayed, as shifting weather conditions, such as a rise in temperature or wind speed, can trigger a drift event. No matter how careful a farmer is, this volatile herbicide is just inherently difficult to control. As an herbicide, it’s meant to damage or kill any plant that isn’t genetically modified to resist it. So when it drifts, it commonly damages or kills the plants it lands on, but they aren’t always weeds. Other crops, trees, wildflowers, pollinator habitats and people’s own backyard gardens can all be damaged by drifting dicamba.

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

Despite putting restrictions in place to attempt to reduce the drift, the EPA has not seen significant improvement in the problem. A few farmers shouldn't be allowed to make a decision that wreaks havoc on everyone else's farms, parks and gardens. That's why PIRG is calling on the EPA to ban destructive dicamba and set a precedent that the agency must consider a pesticide's propensity to drift in its future decisions about whether to register pesticides.

UTILITY WATCHDOG

Illinois PIRG cheers win for utility customers

On Nov. 16, Illinois regulators voted on three major gas utility rate decisions that will help gas utility customers across the state.

Regulators took critical first steps to reform the failing Peoples Gas pipe replacement program as Illinois PIRG and our members have for years been calling for. The pipe replacement decision is just one of many across three utility rate cases. In all cases, the five-person Illinois Commerce Commission approved lower rate increases than requested by utilities.

The Commission also took important steps to lower profit rates, rein in unnecessary utility spending, lower fixed customer charges, plan for the future of the gas system, and create robust low-income discount rates.

"This decision is a major victory for Chicagoans forced to pay ever-escalating bills for the failing Peoples Gas pipe replacement program. At long last, regulators are holding Peoples Gas and its troubled program accountable," said Illinois PIRG State Director Abe Scarr. "There is much more work to do, especially as Illinois considers a transition to powering our homes with clean energy. We look forward to charting a better path forward for Illinois utility customers."

CLEAN AIR

Leaf blowers aren't just noisy—they're also huge polluters

You know that annoying sound all too well—the ear-piercing whine of your neighbor's leaf blower.

But as it turns out, gas-powered leaf blowers



and other lawn equipment are more than just a noisy neighborhood nuisance, with some machines emitting as much pollution in an hour as driving hundreds of miles in a car. And that pollution is released right in the middle of our neighborhoods, where people live and breathe, putting our health at risk.

The good news is electric lawn equipment is cleaner, quieter—and, over a lifetime of use, often cheaper—than gasoline-powered machines. Moreover, electric options are often just as capable as fossil fuel versions.

Our network recently released a new report across the country called "Lawn care goes electric" to help educate the public and call for cities and states around the country to take action to encourage the transition from gasoline-powered lawn equipment to clean electric options.

Visit our website to check out the report and learn more about why transitioning to electric lawn equipment is a good idea.

Outside Peoples Gas headquarters in Chicago, Illinois PIRG's Abe Scarr rallies residents in opposition to the largest gas utility rate hike in state history.

GO PAPERLESS!
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Illinois PIRG

CITIZEN AGENDA • WINTER 2024

50
YEARS

Illinois PIRG 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.

BEYOND PLASTIC

Amazon announces the end of plastic-padded shipping bags

In July 2023, Amazon announced that it would be “phasing out padded bags containing plastics in favor of recyclable alternatives.”

The eventual end of the blue and white plastic mailing envelopes is welcome news. Most plastic is landfilled, burned in incinerators, or broken into small pieces in the environment, rather than being recycled. Plastics have been found in nearly every corner of the globe, as well as in human bodies, potentially with harmful impacts.

Amazon is changing its practices after PIRG worked with Environment America and other allies to call on the company to reduce its single-use plastic packaging. Similar actions also have resulted in 1 in every 3 Americans living in a state with a ban of at least one type of single-use plastic. The action



PIRG staff delivered more than 97,000 petition signatures from members and supporters urging Amazon to “break up with plastic” on Valentine’s Day in 2023.

of one company or a few states won’t solve the whole plastic waste problem. But each new commitment to reduce plastic waste paves the way for the next.

Thanks to your action and support, we’ll continue to urge companies to reduce wasteful plastic packaging.

FEATURED STAFF



Abe Scarr: As Illinois PIRG state director, Abe is a lead advocate in Springfield and in the media for stronger consumer protections, utility accountability and good government. In 2017, he led a coalition to pass legislation to implement automatic voter registration in Illinois, winning unanimous support in the General Assembly for the bill. Previously, Abe worked as the state director for ConnPIRG, where he helped pass a landmark solid waste and recycling law.

Kimball Nelson

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