

MASSPIRG



MASSPIRG's Janet Domenitz 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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MASSPIRG 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 repairability 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

BEYOND PLASTIC

Costco makes new commitments to reduce plastic use

Thanks to your support, MASSPIRG and our national network delivered more than 82,000 petitions urging Costco to cut back on wasteful packaging—and the company is listening.

Costco Wholesale has committed to increasing its transparency about its plastic use and developing a 5-year action plan to reduce the amount of plastic it uses. A growing body of data suggests that plastics and microplastics pose significant threats to public health and our environment.

Costco has committed to releasing data on the total plastic footprint—broken down by type of plastic—of its in-house brand, Kirkland Signature, by July 2024. The big box retailer has also committed to disclosing the percentage of recycled content used in its plastic packaging by that same date. Additionally, in December 2024, the company will release a 5-year plastic “action plan” that will outline the steps the company will take to reduce plastic in its Kirkland Signature packaging.

Costco’s commitments come after calls from both shareholders and the general public.

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.

CONSUMER WATCHDOG

Report: Toys that spy on children are a growing threat

Children today face dangers that people who came of age before the smartphone era never did.

MASSPIRG was joined by child safety and privacy advocates to release MASSPIRG Education Fund's 38th annual Trouble in Toyland report, which looked at the smart devices surrounding us—things with microphones, cameras, connectivity, location trackers, poor security and more. In addition to smart toys, MASSPIRG Education Fund looked at several low-tech threats, including water beads, button batteries and recalled and counterfeit toys for sale.

"Every year, about 150,000 children are treated in emergency rooms for toy-related injuries," said Deirdre Cummings, consumer program director for MASSPIRG Education Fund. "There is so much more we can do to protect them; for starters, I should not have been able to purchase these toys that have already been recalled because of their risk to children."

MASSPIRG demonstrated how some of the smart toys worked, and showcased recently purchased recalled toys, and how the popular water beads pose a threat to children.

The report provides helpful summaries about how specific smart toys work and important tips and questions for parents and gift-givers to ask before buying a toy with a microphone, a camera, a Wi-Fi or Bluetooth connection or any ability to collect information about young children. The report also walks through what to look for in a toy's privacy policy.

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.

MASSPIRG Education Fund Consumer Program Director Deirdre Cummings walks through the dangers of toys highlighted in our 38th annual Trouble in Toyland report.

GO PAPERLESS!

Sign up for the latest MASSPIRG news, updates and alerts sent directly to your inbox at: masspirg.org.



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

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294 Washington St., Ste. 500
Boston, MA 02108
(617) 292-4800

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MASSPIRG

CITIZEN AGENDA • WINTER 2024

50
YEARS

MASSPIRG 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

Thousands signed petition in support of Better Bottle Bill

After talking with citizens across Massachusetts this past summer, MASSPIRG staff delivered more than 6,000 signatures they collected from supporters and members like you in support of An Act to Update the Bottle Bill. This legislation would update Massachusetts' landmark law some 40 years after its passage.

The bill, which would expand the types of containers covered by a deposit to include water bottles, sports drinks and more, and increase the deposit from a nickel to a dime, is sponsored by state Rep. Marjorie Decker and state Sen. Cindy Creem. It had a public hearing in June and is awaiting action from the Telecom, Utilities and Energy Committee.

Lauren Winkler, the director of the canvass campaign, said: "In cities and sub-



MASSPIRG staff deliver more than 6,000 signatures in support of the Better Bottle Bill to the offices of state legislators.

urbs, from the Berkshires to the Cape, people repeatedly told us that they are sick of plastic and beverage container litter. Updating the bottle bill is a logical and straightforward way to address those concerns."

FEATURED STAFF



Janet Domenitz: Janet has been the executive director of MASSPIRG since 1990 and directs programs on consumer protection, solid waste reduction and recycling, health and safety, public transportation, and voter participation. She also serves as vice president for the Consumer Federation of America. Janet helped pass the Massachusetts Toxics Use Reduction Act, which was the only U.S. policy to be shortlisted for the international Future Policy Award 2021.

Kimball Nelson

Liese Jones Photography

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