

Maryland 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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Maryland 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

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY PIRG urged Mastercard to stop selling user data

Almost every company we interact with collects some amount of data on us. Often, it’s more information than they really need—and it’s often used for secondary purposes that have nothing to do with delivering the service we’re expecting to get.

Mastercard collects data about its cardholders—like how much they spend, where and on what day. It makes sense that Mastercard uses this information to complete transactions.

What doesn’t make sense is that Mastercard then uses that data for purposes that have nothing to do with being a credit card—like selling it to data brokers, advertisers and other third parties. It doesn’t need to sell our data to be a credit card—but it’s profitable for it to do so.

We’re urging Mastercard to commit to using the transaction data it collects for what we’re expecting—being a safe, secure credit card and nothing else.

When we stand together to protect our data, we can convince Mastercard to change its practices. Sign our petition on our website to let Mastercard know its data sales need to stop. You can also email Mastercard’s privacy complaints

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

email (privacyanddataprotection@mastercard.com) and send them the clear message: Stop selling my data.

UTILITY WATCHDOG

Enough is enough: Utility customers speak out against BGE's proposed rate hike

It's time to rein in BGE's out-of-control spending on infrastructure, which is driving up gas bills.

Baltimoreans and Central Maryland residents came together last fall to speak out against BGE's proposed \$574.6 million multi-year rate hike in an event organized by Economic Action Maryland, Maryland PIRG Foundation and SEIU1199.

If approved by the Maryland Public Service Commission, BGE's proposal would increase our utility bills and make big investments in polluting fossil fuels. BGE already hiked rates in 2022 and 2023. According to the Office of the People's Counsel, BGE's proposal would result in customers' annual gas and electric bills being, on average, \$810 more in 2026 than in 2023.

"We know the shift to clean, efficient, electric homes won't happen overnight, but it calls to question the approval of massive new gas infrastructure spending that ratepayers will be paying off long past when we expect to have transitioned off fossil fuels," said Maryland PIRG State Director Emily Scarr.

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.

R.J. Cross, director of PIRG's Don't Sell My Data campaign, speaks to the media about protecting consumer data.

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.

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Support our work in the public interest by including a gift to Maryland PIRG or Maryland PIRG Foundation in your will, trust or retirement accounts.

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

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Maryland PIRG

CITIZEN AGENDA • WINTER 2024



Maryland 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



Emily Scarr: *Emily directs strategy, organizational development, research, communications and legislative advocacy for Maryland PIRG. She recently helped win small donor public financing in Montgomery and Howard counties, as well as the Maryland Keep Antibiotics Effective Act to protect public health by restricting the use of antibiotics on Maryland farms.*

Kimball Nelson

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