



# CALPIRG

2023 PROGRAM REPORT

# YOUR SUPPORT MADE IT POSSIBLE



## DEAR MEMBER

*As a consumer advocate, CALPIRG can help people save a dollar or avoid a scam. But people have come to expect so much more from PIRG's unique brand of consumer action.*

*After all, in today's economy, the best deal may be the one that measures value in terms of quality, not quantity. Healthcare that prioritizes wellness, for example, over the most costly treatments. Or products that last, and can be repaired, repurposed and recycled, sparing us (and the planet) the costs of waste.*

*In this report, you'll find PIRG staff and members taking action and winning results to reduce wasteful plastic packaging, expand the right to repair, and more.*

*We're grateful that so many people like you support PIRG's advocacy and action. Thank you.*



Jenn Engstrom  
State Director

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

**“PIRG keeps me informed. A variety of topics are covered from individual changes I can make to larger government issues that I can at least sign letters of concern. I greatly appreciate PIRG for fighting for a safer, healthier world.”**

Helen M., Member

Photos: (Cover) CALPIRG State Director Jenn Engstrom calls for the Right to Repair in California. (Left) CALPIRG's Jenn Engstrom, along with staff from Environment America and Oceana, delivered more than 97,000 petition signatures to Amazon asking the e-commerce company to reduce plastic packaging. Credits: (Cover) Andy Smith. (Left) Ricky Osborne.

ACTION IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST  
**RIGHT TO REPAIR**



# Victory: California adopted a statewide Right To Repair law

Things just aren't made to last anymore, resulting in more waste and more cost to consumers. In 2023, CALPIRG staff and supporters like you helped pass the Right to Repair Act, which significantly expands consumers' and independent repair shops' access to repair materials needed to fix electronics and appliances in California.

It was a victory years in the making. We shined a spotlight on the issue with reports, held legislative briefings, organized "fix it" clinics and won news coverage. Our efforts paid off with a swell of support from tech giants, elected officials, independent repair shops, and various other recyclers, school boards and law professors.



Photos: (Left) CALPIRG staff and volunteers with state Sen. Susan Talamantes Eggman and our partners at Californians Against Waste and the Electronic Frontier Foundation calling for the Right to Repair. (Above, clockwise) CALPIRG's Jenn Engstrom speaks at a hearing; PIRG called on Google for longer-lasting Chromebooks in schools; state Asm. Chris Holden met with CALPIRG on Right to Repair. Credits: (Left) Andy Smith. (Above, clockwise) California State Assembly, Peter Mui, Staff.

ACTION IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST  
**BEYOND PLASTIC**



**BEYOND PLASTIC**  
PIRG.org

**AMAZON:  
BREAK UP  
WITH PLASTICS**

**BREAK  
UP WITH  
PLASTICS**

**LESS PLASTIC  
IS MY VALENTINE!**

**97,555**

**LESS PLASTIC  
IS MY  
VALENTINE**

*Amazon.*  
♥  
**Let's break up  
with plastic!**  
PIRG

# Waste reduced: Amazon is phasing out padded plastic bags

It can be frustrating trying to reduce plastic in your own life when it's all but impossible to avoid. It's even more frustrating when it doesn't get recycled as promised.

After a group of CALPIRG volunteers investigated and found that the plastic Amazon shipping packaging they tried to recycle was instead sent to the landfill, CALPIRG supporters like you and our national coalition delivered more than 138,000 petition signatures urging the company to eliminate plastic in U.S. shipments. Amazon responded, announcing it would phase out padded plastic shipping bags in favor of recyclable alternatives. We're continuing to call on Amazon to eliminate all plastic packaging in its shipments.



Photos: (Left) PIRG staff and volunteers deliver more than 97,000 Valentine's Day petition signatures to Amazon headquarters in February. (Above, left to right) A Student PIRG volunteer outside Amazon headquarters; CALPIRG's Jenn Engstrom holds up an electronic tracker, which we used to follow Amazon's plastic packaging to landfills. Credits: (Left) Ricky Osborne. (Above, left to right) Ricky Osborne, Staff, ErickPHOTOPRO via Shutterstock.

ACTION IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

# CONSUMER PROTECTION





# Kids protected: We alerted the public to unsafe toys and more

We all need a little help to stay safe in today's marketplace. In 2023, PIRG's consumer watchdog team alerted the public to dangerous products aimed at kids—and called for changes to keep kids safe.

Our national research partners' 38th annual "Trouble in Toyland" report warned parents of unsafe toys such as water beads, which can expand in a child's airway or stomach if swallowed. We also took on new technology, such as the Meta Quest virtual reality headset, which can expose children to inappropriate content, health risks and data privacy threats. We urged Meta to stop marketing the headsets to kids under 18.



Photos: (Left) PIRG's R.J. Cross demonstrates the Meta Quest 3 virtual reality headset at a press conference. (Above, clockwise) PIRG's Teresa Murray speaks with KAEF about unsafe toys; popular toy water beads; a child plays with a VR headset. Credits: (Left) Tim O'Connor. (Above, clockwise) KAEF, Tony Hisgett via Flickr, CC BY 2.0 DEED, [creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/), [flic.kr/p/aSpj9z](https://flic.kr/p/aSpj9z), bbernard via Shutterstock.

## MORE ACTION IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

# BAN TOXIC PFAS



Kong Lor

In February, REI Co-op announced it would require its suppliers to eliminate all per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, from outdoor gear sold by the retail chain by 2026. The win came after thousands of PIRG supporters like you signed a petition to the outdoor retailer, urging it to make its products PFAS-free.

# HIGH VALUE HEALTH CARE



blurAZ via Shutterstock

In October, CALPIRG helped win protections against surprise medical bills from ground ambulances, which originally was exempt from the No Surprises Act to limit how much out-of-network medical providers can charge patients, easing financial worries for Californians in emergencies.

# RIGHT TO REPAIR



Leise Jones Photography

In September, PIRG helped win a commitment from Google to keep working electronics out of the trash. As schools struggled to replace “expired” Chromebooks only a few years old, we worked with parents and teachers to convince Google to extend the automatic update “expiration date” to 10 years for newer Chromebook models.

# PIRG CONSUMER WATCHDOG



CBS News

In July, PIRG warned that two-thirds of phone companies had not yet adopted robocall-fighting technology, as required by law. Scam calls are a huge problem—consumers defrauded over the phone lost a median of \$1,400 in 2022. PIRG called on the Federal Communications Commission to crack down on illegal robocalls.

# ELECTRIC BUSES CALIFORNIA



Ricky Mackie Photography

In October, California passed a law requiring that newly purchased school buses in California be zero-emission. This victory followed CALPIRG’s advocacy, which demonstrated the harms of diesel exhaust to schoolchildren and outlined how electric school buses could speed California’s transition to a clean electric grid.

# STOP THE OVERUSE OF ANTIBIOTICS



Metroid Video

In December, PIRG celebrated a win when a federal court ruled that an antibiotic important to human health couldn’t be used as a citrus tree pesticide. The overuse of antibiotics is fueling the rise of drug-resistant bacteria, and PIRG is continuing to advocate for the responsible use of these life-saving drugs.

# 50 YEARS OF ACTION & RESULTS

**CALPIRG** is part of a federation of independent, state-based, citizen funded Public Interest Research Groups. Together, we have a long legacy of victories in the public interest—including state and local wins that have provided blueprints for action nationwide.

## **1985: CALPIRG removes toxic art supplies from classrooms**

CALPIRG wins a new law to ban toxic art supplies in schools and to improve the labeling of these products. A CALPIRG report found toxic ingredients in art supplies purchased by California school districts for use by more than 1 million students.

## **1990: California reduces more toxic chemicals**

CALPIRG helps win a law defining Toxics Use Reduction, requiring industries to publicly disclose their use of toxic chemicals and plan for future reductions.



## **1990: California establishes first clean car standards**

CALPIRG's advocacy and action establishes the Low-Emission Vehicle (LEV) program, setting the strictest tailpipe emission standards in the nation. The CALPIRG-backed law helps clean up California's air and prompts other states to enact LEV standards of their own.

## **1994: CALPIRG defends clean cars**

After California created the country's first Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) standards, Mary Raftery and CALPIRG were instrumental in defending the

program against an auto industry attempt to roll them back in 1994.

## **1998: CALPIRG wins reduction of pesticides in schools**

CALPIRG helps win a series of laws to reduce the use of pesticides linked to cancer and other serious health problems in public schools throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.

## **1999: California upped the ante by adopting the LEV II program**

Thanks to CALPIRG, sport cars, minivans and trucks are now subject to the same clean car standards as any other vehicle.



Photos: (Above, left to right) CALPIRG's Deb Bruns in 1990; CALPIRG Legislative Director Mary Raftery; CALPIRG students launch the "Pesti-challenge" to build support for reducing the use of toxic pesticides. Credits: Staff, Staff, Staff.



**Five decades ago, groups of college students began** investigating problems from shady business practices to illegal pollution. They called themselves PIRG—Public Interest Research Groups. CALPIRG and the PIRG network are celebrating 50 years of action for a change.



### **2003: CALPIRG protects consumer privacy from banks**

CALPIRG helps win the nation’s toughest consumer privacy measure, requiring banks to ask customers’ permission before sharing their information.

### **2004: California prohibits inappropriate gifts to doctors**

With CALPIRG’s support, California passes a bill that prohibits inappropriate gifts to doctors on behalf of pharmaceutical companies, helping to drive down the high cost of prescription drugs for patients.

### **2014: California bans single-use plastic bags**

After building support in cities and counties, CALPIRG helps pass the nation’s first statewide ban on single-use plastic bags in California. Ten more states follow suit over the next decade.

### **2015: CALPIRG helps reduce the overuse of antibiotics on farms**

CALPIRG helps protect the effectiveness of our lifesaving antibiotics by winning a law that limits their use on healthy livestock.



### **2018: CALPIRG strengthens consumer privacy protection**

CALPIRG co-sponsors successful groundbreaking privacy law, adopted as part of the California Consumer Privacy Act, to prevent future data breaches and hold negligent companies accountable.

### **2020: CALPIRG helps ban toxic chemicals from cosmetics**

CALPIRG helps win the Toxic-Free Cosmetics Act to ban 24 toxic ingredients in cosmetics, including more than a dozen types of PFAS.

Photos: (Above, left to right) CALPIRG staff attorney Teri Olle shakes Gov. Gray Davis’ hand after he signed the Healthy Schools Act into law; CALPIRG Director Emily Rusch speaks to the media about consumer privacy; CALPIRG Advocate Laura Deehan calls for toxic-free cosmetics. Credits: Staff, NBC Bay Area, Staff.



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## **YOUR CONSUMER ADVOCATES**

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State Director

**Emily Rusch**  
Vice President and Senior Director of  
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**R.J. Cross**  
Director, Don't Sell My Data Campaign

**Lucas Gutterman**  
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To see a full staff list and learn more about our campaigns, visit us online at [calpirg.org/about/team](https://calpirg.org/about/team).