

2023 PROGRAM REPORT



Illinois PIRG

ACTION IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

YOUR SUPPORT MADE IT POSSIBLE



DEAR MEMBER

As a consumer advocate, Illinois PIRG 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.



Abe Scarr
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) PIRG's Lucas Gutterman releases the "Chromebook Churn" report in front of Google's offices in April 2023. (Left) 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. Credits: (Cover) Leise Jones Photography. (Left) Staff.

ACTION IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

CONSUMER WATCHDOG

160 NORTH
LASALLE STREET



Utility oversight: We halted a \$265 million boondoggle

For years, we've called on decision-makers to assert greater oversight over Illinois' utilities and to reform the \$11 billion Peoples Gas pipeline replacement boondoggle.

Through original research, we drew attention to the program's mismanagement, safety failures, ballooning costs and absurdity in the face of climate change. Thanks to your support, we assembled a coalition of over 50 organizations, and we won media attention and the support of state and local decision-makers. In November, the Illinois Commerce Commission paused the program and launched a formal investigation. Now we're participating in the investigation, advocating to overhaul the program to reduce costs while enhancing safety measures.



Photos: (Left) Illinois PIRG staff and allies thank the Illinois Commerce Commission for its recent decision to pause and investigate Peoples Gas' failed pipeline replacement program. (Above, clockwise) Volunteers at a rally outside Peoples Gas headquarters; Illinois PIRG's Abe Scarr on Fox 32; Abe at a town hall meeting. Credits: (Left) Staff. (Above, clockwise) Staff, Fox 32, Staff.

ACTION IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST
BEYOND PLASTIC



BEYOND PLASTIC
PIRG.org

**AMAZON:
BREAK UP
WITH PLASTICS**

AMAZON
PLASTIC
WASTE

**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 you put it in the blue bin, but it doesn't get recycled as promised.

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



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; PIRG'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/, flic.kr/p/aSpj9z, bbernard via Shutterstock.

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



Ways and Means Committee Republicans via YouTube

In February, PIRG filed comments with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, urging it to improve its process to allow generic drugs to reach pharmacy shelves. And in March, PIRG's Patricia Kelmar testified before a House committee to advocate for reining in the high cost of prescription drugs.

RIGHT TO REPAIR



Peter Mui

In September, Google announced it would extend the automatic update to 10 years for all post-2021 Chromebook models. This commitment to keep working electronics out of the waste stream came after PIRG found that doubling the life of Chromebooks could result in \$1.8 billion dollars in savings for taxpayers.

PIRG **W** CONSUMER WATCHDOG



Ground Picture via Shutterstock

In 2023, Illinois drivers' car insurance rates rose by more than \$1.25 billion. PIRG raised the alarm on excessive and unfair rates in Illinois. We advocated for meaningful regulatory oversight and insurance pricing based on driver safety, as opposed to one's credit score or zip code.

CLEAN AIR ILLINOIS

CLEANER, QUIETER LAWN CARE



Roman023_photography via Shutterstock

In October, PIRG released a report warning that gasoline-powered lawn equipment is dirtier than you might expect—for example, using a commercial gas-powered leaf blower for one hour emits as much smog-forming pollution as 15 cars. Our advocates shined a spotlight on cleaner, quieter electric alternatives.

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

Illinois PIRG 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.

1971: First PIRGs founded

Students start the first college campus chapters of Minnesota PIRG, Missouri PIRG and Oregon Student PIRG. PIRGs form in 20 more states over the next decade, and U.S. PIRG is founded in 1983.

1982: MASSPIRG saves the Bottle Bill

After winning a 9-year campaign to pass the Bottle Bill, MASSPIRG faced a new challenge: an industry attempt to repeal it. More than 8,000 citizen volunteers got to work, ultimately helping to defeat the repeal with a convincing 59% of the vote.



1984: PIRG hits student voter registration milestone

PIRG's newly launched National Student Campaign for Voter Registration registers 750,000 student voters in its first year, increasing the registration of 18- to 24-year-old voters by 17%.

1986: PIRG wins drinking water protections

PIRG plays a key role in passing strong new federal Safe Drinking Water Act amendments to better protect groundwater sources of drinking water and increase the pace at which contaminants are regulated.

1989: 'Trouble in Toyland' report sparks action

PIRG's first annual "Trouble in Toyland" report is released, warning parents of the hidden dangers of certain toys on the market. U.S. PIRG Education Fund has since published 36 other reports, resulting in more than 150 recalls.

1989: MASSPIRG wins law to reduce toxics

MASSPIRG authors and wins the passage of the Toxics Use Reduction Act, requiring industries to publicly disclose their use of toxic chemicals for the first time and plan for future reductions.



Photos: (Above, left to right) MASSPIRG's Mindy Lubber and Doug Phelps promote the Massachusetts Bottle Bill in 1981; PIRG's Lucinda Sikes speaks to the media about toy safety; Tufts University students show support for Massachusetts' hazardous waste initiative. 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. Illinois PIRG and the PIRG network are celebrating 50 years of action for a change.



1998: PIRG wins reduction of pesticides in schools

CALPIRG, MASSPIRG and Maryland PIRG help 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.

2010: PIRG helps create CFPB

PIRG co-founds a coalition that, alongside U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren, wins the creation of the federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). Since opening its doors in 2011, the CFPB has helped return \$16 billion in relief for consumers.

2012: PIRG helps win national clean car standards

Following years of advocacy by the state PIRGs, the Obama administration implements new national clean car standards calling for the average mile-per-gallon standard across the U.S. fleet of cars to hit 54.5 by 2025.

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: Tyson Foods announces antibiotics phase-out

PIRG helps convince the nation's largest poultry producer, Tyson Foods, to commit to no longer using medically important antibiotics in their chicken, paving the way for other corporations to follow suit.

2018: PIRG helps win free credit freezes for consumers

In the wake of several high profile data breaches, including at credit bureau Equifax, PIRG helps pass a federal bill ensuring access to free credit freezes for all consumers to help prevent damage from identify theft.

Photos: (Above, left to right) CALPIRG staff attorney Teri Olle shakes Gov. Gray Davis' hand after he signed the Healthy Schools Act into law; PIRG helped build a coalition across California to build voter support for Prop 67, which banned single-use plastic bags; PIRG's Sujatha Jahagirdar Bergen speaks about antibiotic resistance in 2014. Credits: Staff; staff; Beverly Jensen Photography.



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To see a full staff list and learn more about our campaigns, visit us online at illinoispirg.org/about/team.