

# Illinois PIRG



Our latest research shows that plastic bag bans can eliminate almost 300 single-use plastic bags per person, per year. Credit: AP Photo/The Republican-American, Jim Shannon

## BEYOND PLASTIC

# Bag bans are reducing billions of single-use plastic bags

Our latest research affirms what many are now experiencing in their daily lives: Well-designed single-use plastic bag bans are highly effective in reducing plastic bag use, associated litter and pollution.

“Plastic Bag Bans Work,” a new report released by our research partners U.S. PIRG Education Fund, Environment America Research & Policy Center and Frontier Group, estimates that, on average, plastic bag bans similar to those studied can eliminate almost 300 single-use plastic bags per person, per year. Studied bans have also reduced plastic bag litter by one-third or more and encouraged the use of more sustainable options.

“The bottom line is that plastic bag bans work,” said PIRG President Faye Park. “People realize quickly it’s easy to live without plastic bags and get used to bringing a bag from home or skip-

ping a bag when they can. That means less waste and less litter. For our children to inherit a less polluted earth, that’s exactly what we need.”

### What’s the problem with plastic bags?

In the U.S., we generate 35 million tons of plastic waste each and every year.

We didn’t ask for all this plastic waste, but we can’t avoid it. If you’ve ever tried to go shopping without bringing home a big pile of unnecessary packaging, or if you’ve done any online shopping, you know how hard it is to avoid wasteful plastic.

When it comes to single-use plastic bags, most of those bags are used briefly then discarded, with an average life span of 12 minutes.

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

SUMMER 2024

## SINGLE-USE PLASTIC BAG BANS CONT.

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*Single-use plastic bags are used for an average of 12 minutes, but end up polluting our environment for hundreds of years.*

But because they're not biodegradable, they pollute the environment for hundreds of years.

### Every local bag ban is having an impact

PIRG is working to ban single-use plastic across the country, and thanks to the support and action of members like you, nearly three in ten Americans currently live in a state that has banned single-use plastic bags.

And there has been real progress getting statewide bag bans implemented. So far, 12 states and more than 500 local ordinances have passed plastic bag bans. But there is still a lot more we can do to eliminate single use plastic bags.

Our report analyzed data from across the country and found that bans in just five locations (with a combined population of more than 12 million people) have cut single-use plastic bag consumption by about 6 billion bags per year—or enough to circle the Earth 42 times.

On our website, our single-use plastic bag ban waste reduction calculator uses the number of bags saved by the typical bag ban to estimate the number of bags that would be eliminated in cities and states with similar bans.

Illinois doesn't currently have a statewide bag ban, but several communities have passed their own local bans.

According to our calculator, if Illinois enacted a statewide ban on single-use plastic bags, we could reduce an estimated 3.7 billion single-use plastic bags from being used each year.

### But not all bag bans are equally effective

Well-designed plastic bag bans encourage a shift toward truly sustainable options such as reusable bags, but not all plastic bag bans are created equal.

Some cities and states have adopted policies that deliver reductions in overall plastic bag use but also contain loopholes that allow for the continued use of some types of plastic bags, or that fail to discourage consumers from shifting to single-use paper bags. Even bans with loopholes have driven significant reductions in the number of plastic bags used overall, and in the amount of plastic bag litter found in coastal areas.

To reduce the plastic pollution that threatens our health and our environment, policymakers should adopt a strong statewide ban on single-use plastic bags to minimize plastic waste and should close loopholes that weaken or counteract the effectiveness of existing bans.

## NEWS BRIEFS

### UTILITY WATCHDOG

#### PIRG advocacy helps strike down proposed ComEd rate hike, saving consumers millions

The ComEd bribery scheme has so far led to five criminal convictions and major changes in Illinois political leadership—but the favorable policies the utility won through its scheme have largely stayed in place. Even worse, Illinois PIRG warned in 2021 that energy legislation passed in the wake of the scandal could be even more profitable for ComEd.

In December 2023, regulators at the Illinois Commerce Commission rejected ComEd's proposed \$1.5 billion rate hike through which the utility would earn a virtually guaranteed \$1 billion in profit per year. Responding to arguments from Illinois PIRG and others, the Commission authorized a much lower profit rate than ComEd proposed, and ordered ComEd to redo its grid plan, finding the plan did not comply with the law in a number of specific ways. This is a huge deal that will save consumers hundreds of millions of dollars while improving utility service in the years to come.

### 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

For years, Illinois PIRG has been a ComEd watchdog, from filing lawsuits to drafting reports and forming coalitions. ComEd, the largest electric utility in Illinois, entered into a deferred prosecution agreement with federal prosecutors for rewarding former Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan and his allies in order to assist with the passage of favorable legislation over nearly a decade.

“Among the ways in which the Commission found the grid plans fell short was in including a cost benefit analysis of proposed investments,” said Abe Scarr, state director of Illinois PIRG. “This is core to Illinois PIRG’s utility watchdog program: ensuring that utility policy maximizes benefits for utility customers and the public in the form of reliable service, environmental protection, and reasonable bills.”

### PESTICIDES

#### **This brain-damaging pesticide was banned in 2021. Now, it’s coming back.**

A previously banned dangerous pesticide is now set to make a comeback due to a recent court decision, and it could put children’s health at risk.

Chlorpyrifos, a pesticide that had once been labeled a dangerous neurotoxin and banned in 2021 thanks to the help of more than 27,000 PIRG members and supporters like you taking action and voicing their concerns to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), is now potentially set to make a comeback.

The science has been clear on the effects of chlorpyrifos, with years of research showing the pesticide has consistently been linked to brain damage, especially in children. A court recently overturned the ban despite mountains of scientific research proving chlorpyrifos is dangerous for human consumption. Now it risks reemerging on farms that grow the food our families eat.

We need to act fast and once again urge the EPA to stick to the science and protect kids’ health. The sooner the EPA reinstates its ban on chlorpyrifos, the less likely it is that this hazardous chemical will be used on the food we eat next year.



Tim O'Connor

### CONSUMER PROTECTION

#### **Meta should protect kids’ safety in Quest virtual reality**

Has a kid in your life been begging you for a virtual reality headset? They can be pretty fun, but before you go out and buy one, there are a few things you need to know.

Meta recently lowered the recommended minimum age for its VR headsets, allowing children ages 10 to 12 to have accounts. Our research partners at U.S. PIRG Education Fund tested Meta’s newest headset, the Quest 3, and warns that it may be unsafe for kids. Even with increased parental controls, the Quest virtual reality headset could potentially expose young users to inappropriate content, health risks and threats to their privacy.

Illinois PIRG and our national network are urging Meta not to market its VR headsets to children and teens under 18 unless and until they’re proven safe. Visit our website to add your name to our petition to Meta today.

*R.J. Cross, director of PIRG’s Don’t Sell My Data campaign, demonstrates the Meta Quest 3 at a press conference.*

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# Illinois PIRG

CITIZEN AGENDA • SUMMER 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.

## UTILITY WATCHDOG

# Illinois holds Peoples Gas accountable

Chicago gas utility Peoples Gas has been making record profits while failing to deliver on its promise to the public to replace unsafe pipes. With support from the public and members like you, Illinois PIRG has pushed the Illinois Commerce Commission to hold Peoples Gas accountable for its failures.

In November 2023, on the advice of Illinois PIRG and co-intervening organizations, the commission disallowed the entire proposed 2024 pipeline replacement budget, paused the program and ordered a new investigation into the program.

“[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 account-



Illinois PIRG staff and allies thank the Illinois Commerce Commission for its recent decision to pause and investigate Peoples Gas' failed pipeline replacement program.

able,” said Illinois PIRG Director Abe Scarr.

Illinois PIRG will be actively participating in the program investigation, which you can learn more about on our website.

## VOICES FOR RIGHT TO REPAIR

*“The main problem with these designs in my opinion are the specialty tools and techniques that are required ... A good example would be link belt. You can put a new sensor on a machine, go directly into the screen in the cab with a password, simply tell the machine there is a new sensor. In a similar fashion you can read the fault codes. Other manufacturers need special computers and expensive software with passwords only available to factory trained technicians to do the same thing ... A job as simple as replacing an alternator can take weeks.”*

— Jack Elliott, Illinois

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