

MASSPIRG



MASSPIRG's Janet Domenitz releases the new report "Plastic Bag Bans Work." Credit: Liam Louis, ElleVignette Photography

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.

Continued on page 2



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

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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.

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

According to our calculator, if Massachusetts enacted a statewide ban on single-use plastic bags, we could reduce an estimated 2 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

FOOD AND FARMING

MASSPIRG and Clean Water Action collaborate to reduce food waste

Two of Massachusetts' leading advocacy groups, MASSPIRG and Clean Water Action, are joining forces to launch a new campaign to reduce food waste. The campaign will focus on the environmental and public health benefits of right-sizing our food production and portions.

We've already taken steps toward reducing food waste. A memo from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) reported that Massachusetts has made progress in recent years on diverting food waste from landfills and incinerators.

Our goal is to meet DEP's 2030 goals for food waste reduction. To meet them, MASSPIRG Executive Director Janet Domenitz and Clean Water Action Director Cindy Luppi advocate, "Let's double down on our efforts to divert food from landfills and incinerators, and ask our decision-makers to build the infrastructure needed to compost and reuse food scraps in a sustainable manner."

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 PROTECTION

MASSPIRG pushes for protections from junk fees

Have you ever felt prepared to make a purchase, then been surprised by a bunch of extra "junk fees" when you're finally ready to pay? MASSPIRG is calling for the regulation of these hidden fees.

MASSPIRG's Legislative Director Deirdre Cummings testified in December before the office of the Attorney General in support of Attorney General Andrea Campbell's proposed regulations cracking down on hidden "junk fees" by stopping deceptive advertising.

The proposed rules seek to require upfront total pricing, require disclosure about the nature and purpose of fees and taxes, and make it easier for consumers to cancel trial offers and renewal fees.

"Comparable, complete, and timely price information allows consumers to make the right personal choices for their pocket books while also leading to a more competitive marketplace," said Deirdre.

MASSPIRG will continue to support the implementation of appropriate regulations to protect Baystaters like you from junk fees.

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.



Tim O'Connor

"Meta says it's committed to creating safe and positive experiences on Quest. Our testing found real problems remain," said R.J. Cross, director of U.S. PIRG Education Fund's Don't Sell My Data campaign. "Meta's current efforts are not enough to guarantee a healthy experience for children."

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

MASSPIRG 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.

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MASSPIRG

CITIZEN AGENDA • SUMMER 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.

RIGHT TO REPAIR

Popular tech companies are still 'failing the fix'

On Feb. 6, MASSPIRG Education Fund released the third annual version of the "Failing the Fix" scorecard. Companies that design their devices to last receive a good grade, and those "failing the fix" receive poor grades.

Google's Chromebooks, one of the more affordable options on the market, continue to be less repairable than other laptops.

Apple continues to be in last place for laptop repairs, but showed considerable improvement in their cell phone score, rising more than any other company.

Unfixable products have become a pressing issue for consumers and the environment alike. In Massachusetts alone, consumers generate 159,000 tons of e-waste each year.



Liam Louis, Ellevignette Photography

MASSPIRG's Janet Domenitz releases the latest "Failing the Fix" scorecard.

"Consumers pay good money for devices, they deserve ones that will last," said Janet Domenitz, executive director of MASSPIRG. "People want to buy from companies that respect our right to repair and ensure that their devices are designed to last."

VOICES FOR RIGHT TO REPAIR

"Last month my wife's Apple iPad fell off the table and the glass screen shattered. So, after several inquiries it turns out the iPad cannot be opened for repair since Apple glues it shut so tightly that opening it would totally destroy it. This is a \$500 device with a delicate screen that cannot be repaired. Totally unacceptable."

— John Shelton,
Massachusetts