

Maryland 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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Maryland 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.

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

According to our calculator, if Maryland enacted a statewide ban on single-use plastic bags, we could reduce an estimated 1.8 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

RIGHT TO REPAIR

Thousands of Americans share their stories for Right to Repair

"Sad that I have to throw out a \$1,000 smart-phone because I cannot replace the battery. So wasteful," J. R. Riehle said in one of the thousands public comments on Right to Repair sent to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC).

U.S. PIRG Education Fund and iFixit have led the charge for Right to Repair to advocate for Americans' right to fix products they own. PIRG and our allies delivered more than 56,000 signatures calling on the FTC to issue new rules addressing some of the most common barriers to repair.

"In every corner of this country, from Maine to Alaska, from Nebraska to Hawaii, Americans just want to fix their stuff," explains Nathan Proctor, U.S. PIRG Education Fund's Senior Right to Repair campaign director.

With valuable input from all 50 states from supporters and members like you, PIRG is urging for these important steps the FTC should take: create a Repair Score program, require manu-

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

facturers to provide a minimum standard of support for repairs, and protect repair choice.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Marylanders campaign to waste less energy and money

Saving the planet and saving Marylanders' money?

On Jan. 17, more than 100 Marylanders representing 40 community, faith, consumer and environmental organizations turned out to launch the campaign to update EmPOWER Maryland, the state's energy efficiency program.

The groups are calling on the Maryland General Assembly to pass an update to the program to align with the state's climate goals by prioritizing the reduction of climate pollution along with energy conservation. The updated program would incentivize the use of healthy and efficient electric heating and appliances.

"We want to adjust the EmPOWER program to prioritize reducing pollution while maintaining the program's focus on efficiency. We know that the cleanest energy of all is the energy we don't use," said Emily Scarr, state director of Maryland PIRG.

On the Maryland PIRG website, you can find information on how to access energy efficiency services under EmPOWER, so you can save more and pollute less.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Report finds states are failing to protect consumer data

More than 80% of Americans are concerned about data privacy, and a new report shows just how vulnerable we really are.

Research from Maryland PIRG Foundation and Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) found that nearly half of states received a failing grade when it came to protecting consumers' data. This is a major concern, since the more data companies can collect on us, the higher the risk of your data ending up vulnerable to a breach or hack.

The Maryland Online Data Privacy Act of 2024, a bill sponsored by state Sen. Dawn Gile and



Del. Sara Love, is considered the second strongest protection in the country, and has the potential to make a big impact on keeping consumers' data safe. It would require companies to limit their collection and use of sensitive data to essential purposes only.

"The easiest data to keep secure is data that isn't collected in the first place. The best thing for consumers is preventing companies from collecting unnecessary data," said R.J. Cross, Director of Maryland PIRG's Don't Sell My Data campaign. "Maryland has the opportunity to buck the trend and protect consumers."

More than 100 Marylanders launch the campaign to update EmPOWER Maryland, the state's energy efficiency program.

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Maryland PIRG

CITIZEN AGENDA • SUMMER 2024

50
YEARS

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.

BAN TOXIC PFAS

New rules protect consumers from 'forever chemicals'

On Feb. 1, the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) announced two new rules to strengthen the regulation of "forever chemicals," which exist in everything from food packaging to clothing.

Commonly known as PFAS, per- and polyfluorinated substances are a class of thousands of chemicals that are extremely persistent in the environment and human body and can lead to serious health consequences such as kidney and liver disease, birth defects and cancer.

New EPA regulations will require the cleanup of PFAS water contamination in accordance with U.S. PIRG Education Fund and Environment America Research & Policy Center's recommendations in a 2023 report.

"The EPA's proposal is a welcome step



Maryland PIRG canvassers hit the streets last spring to talk to members and citizens about banning toxic PFAS.

toward cleaning up contamination," said Emily Scarr, director of PIRG's Stop Toxic PFAS campaign. "To fully prevent harm from PFAS, we need to phase out the use of the entire class of PFAS and regulate them as a single class. Otherwise, our regulators and lawmakers will be stuck playing an endless game of whack-a mole."

VOICES FOR RIGHT TO REPAIR

"As I have been repairing phones, computers, and other electronic devices for years, it has been exceedingly apparent that currently the state of repairability is horrid. I can say this as I currently work at an electronics repair store, and the amount of times I have been overly frustrated at repairing something that should be so simple, and why is it hard to find genuine parts for an average person. Right to repair isn't just the right to sell the option of repair, but the right to accessibly and affordably repair."

— Chane Rochelle,
Maryland

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