

2023 PROGRAM REPORT



# PennPIRG

ACTION IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

**YOUR SUPPORT MADE IT POSSIBLE**



## DEAR MEMBER

*As a consumer advocate, PennPIRG 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.*



Faye Park  
President, PIRG

## 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



ACTION IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

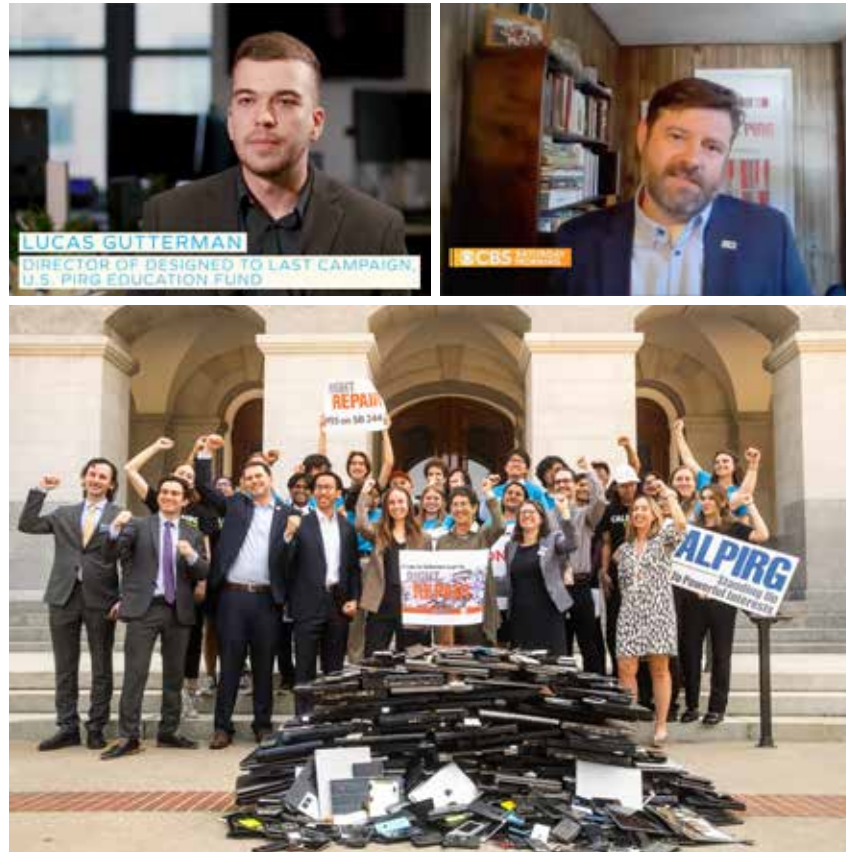
# RIGHT TO REPAIR



# Victory: Google agreed to extend the life of Chromebooks

Things aren't made to last anymore, resulting in more waste and more cost to consumers. In 2023, PIRG's Right to Repair program helped secure a commitment from Google to keep working electronics out of the waste stream.

Three years after the pandemic pushed schools to provide students with Google Chromebooks, many schools were struggling to replace laptops that had "expired." Our federation of state PIRGs and a coalition of nonprofits, parents and teachers called on Google to extend the lifespan of these devices, and in September, Google announced it would extend the automatic update "expiration date" to 10 years for all Chromebook models released since 2021.



Photos: (Above, clockwise) PIRG's Lucas Gutterman speaks with ABC News about our Chromebooks campaign; PIRG Right to Repair Campaign Senior Director Nathan Proctor on CBS; PIRG staff are joined by coalition partners and elected officials to call for the right to repair. Credits: (Left) Peter Mui. (Above, clockwise) ABC, CBS, Andy Smith.



ACTION IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST  
**BEYOND PLASTIC**



AMAZON:  
BREAK UP  
WITH PLASTICS



BREAK  
UP WITH  
PLASTICS

LESS PLASTIC  
IS MY VALENTINE!

97,555

LESS  
PLASTIC  
IS MY  
VALENTINE

BEYOND  
PLASTIC  
PIRG.org

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/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/), [flic.kr/p/aSpj9z](https://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.

## DEFEND THE CONSUMER BUREAU

CFPB



DCStock/Photography via Shutterstock

In May, PIRG joined our coalition partners on an amicus brief, urging the Supreme Court to uphold the constitutionality of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's (CFPB) funding. PIRG helped establish the CFPB in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, and since then, it has returned \$19 billion to consumers.



## PIRG **W** 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.

## CLEAN AIR PENNSYLVANIA

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

**PennPIRG** 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. PennPIRG 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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## **YOUR CONSUMER ADVOCATES**

### **Faye Park**

President, PIRG

### **Emily Rusch**

Vice President and Senior Director of  
State Offices

### **R.J. Cross**

Director, Don't Sell My Data Campaign

### **Lucas Gutterman**

Director, Designed to Last Campaign

### **Patricia Kelmar**

Senior Director, Health Care Campaigns

### **Ed Mierzwinski**

Senior Director, Federal Consumer  
Program

### **Teresa Murray**

Consumer Watchdog

### **Nathan Proctor**

Senior Director, Campaign for the Right  
to Repair

### **Jenny Douglass**

Director, Membership Services

### **Emily Reid**

National Canvass Director

### **Amy Floyd**

Senior Director, Grants

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