

WashPIRG



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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WashPIRG 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 state-wide 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.

According to our calculator, Washington's statewide ban on single-use plastic bags results in an estimated 2.3 billion fewer single-use plastic bags 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 like Washington 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.

We've made great progress banning single-use plastic bags in Washington, but now we need to close a loophole that allows grocery stores to provide thick plastic bags for a fee. And we need more retailers to eliminate single-use plastics, which is why we are calling on retailers like Coca-Cola, Amazon and Costco to eliminate single-use plastic from their operations.

NEWS BRIEFS

BAN TOXIC PFAS

New EPA regulations will better 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 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

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

and regulate them as a single class. Otherwise, our regulators and lawmakers will be stuck playing an endless game of whack-a mole.”

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.

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.



Tim O'Connor

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.

“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.”

WashPIRG 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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WashPIRG

CITIZEN AGENDA • SUMMER 2024

50
YEARS

WashPIRG 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

Thousands share their stories for Right to Repair

“Sad that I have to throw out a \$1,000 smartphone because I cannot replace the battery. So wasteful,” J. R. Riehle said in one of the thousands of 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.



Yazan Aboushi

PIRG advocates with allies and supporters deliver more than 56,000 petition signatures to the FTC in support of Right to Repair.

With valuable input from supporters and members like you from all 50 states, PIRG is urging the FTC to take these important steps: create a Repair Score program, require manufacturers to provide a minimum standard of support for repairs, and protect repair choice.

VOICES FOR RIGHT TO REPAIR

“The art of being a ‘handyman’ is fading fast in a country that was built on self-sufficiency, and I am saddened that my children and grandchildren don’t get to enjoy repairing something instead of throwing it in a landfill.

We must make parts available for all consumer products!”

—Derek Benedict,
Washington