



Ten trillion pellets are estimated to enter the ocean each year, making them the second-largest source of marine microplastic. Credit: Soren Funk via Unsplash

BEYOND PLASTIC

You can help our campaign for microplastic-free waters

Microplastics have been found at the top of the Alps, in the deepest parts of our oceans and likely in your local waterways. Some of this microplastic is in the form of nurdles. You may not be familiar with them, but these lentil-sized plastics pose a huge threat to our waters and wildlife.

Companies shouldn't be allowed to dump or spill plastic into our waterways. That's why PIRG is campaigning to pass the Plastic Pellet Free Waters Act.

What are nurdles, and why are so many in our waterways?

Plastic pellets, also known as nurdles, are an intermediary product between a raw material, such as gas or crude oil, and a finished plastic product. The small size of nurdles makes it easier than it should be for careless companies to spill large quantities into waterways and storm

drains when they're being manufactured or transported.

Ten trillion pellets are estimated to enter the ocean each year, making them the second-largest source of marine microplastic. These plastics dot the beaches of Florida as well as pile up on Oregon, South Carolina and Texas coasts. Inland waters are at risk too. A study of 66 beaches in the Great Lakes region found 60 percent contained nurdles.

Every plastic pellet that has ever been spilled or washed into our waters is likely still out there in some form or another. That's because nurdles can take anywhere from 100 to 1,000 years to break down. Once in the environment, it's far too easy for a bird, fish or turtle to mistake these plastic pellets for food. If they eat enough plastic, they can starve to death.

GO PAPERLESS!
Sign up for the latest Illinois PIRG news, updates and alerts sent directly to your inbox at: illinoispirg.org.

Continued on page 2

FALL 2024

MICROPLASTIC-FREE WATERS CONT.

Althea Rogers



PIRG staff and our network partners at Environment America lobbied Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin and other members of Congress in April, building bipartisan support for the Plastic Pellet Free Waters Act.

Plastic pellets can also absorb toxic chemicals including DDT, PCBs and mercury. These types of pollutants bioaccumulate, meaning they become more concentrated and more toxic as they move up the food chain. If we eat an animal or fish that has ingested nurdles, the plastic and toxic chemicals from that animal will end up in our system, too. Microplastics have been found throughout the human body.

Our existing clean water laws don't do enough

Plastic pellets are extremely difficult to clean up once they reach our waterways, and polluters are not often held accountable. The Clean Water Act is supposed to stop companies from dumping pollution into our rivers, but rules regarding plastic pellets are outdated and often not enforced.

Companies shouldn't be allowed to dump or spill plastic into our waterways. That's why we're working to pass the Plastic Pellet Free Waters Act. The bill would ban discharges of plastic pellets from facilities or sources that make, use, package or transport them.

Momentum is building in Congress to better regulate this major source of microplastic pollution, and the bill now has more than 75 cosponsors in the House of Representatives. If you haven't already, send a message to your member of Congress urging them to support the Plastic Pellet Free Waters Act at pirg.org/microplastics.

Working with allies and neighbors for microplastic-free waters

We're building a powerful coalition of local

water protectors and concerned citizens to help convince Congress to act, before another 10 trillion pellets pour into waterways. We're also helping to organize patrols to go out and look for nurdles in local waterways, then share that data with citizen science projects, such as Nurdle Patrol or Fidra (check out our how-to guide for prospective nurdle hunters on our website). And, when we find companies violating existing clean water laws, we're filing lawsuits to stop pellet pollution.

PIRG has a long history of effective work to reduce plastic waste. Thanks to the support of members like you, our research and advocacy have resulted in more than a dozen states enacting a ban on one or more types of single-use plastic.

With your help, we can pass the Plastic Pellet Free Waters Act. Tell your senator to cosponsor the legislation today.

NEWS BRIEFS

CONSUMER WATCHDOG

You have new rights and protections when you fly

Most of us have experienced the frustrations of flight delays, cancellations and unexpected airline fees. Thankfully, Congress recently passed the Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Act, introducing significant new protections for passengers. Requirements phase in, mostly between now and summer 2025.

The new law requires airlines to issue prompt refunds for canceled or significantly delayed flights and mandates that travel vouchers be valid for at least five years. Airlines must also provide 24/7 customer service and eliminate fees for children under 14 to sit with a parent or adult companion. In addition, airlines that violate the law will face increased maximum civil penalties—up to \$75,000 from the current \$25,000 per violation.

Unfortunately, the bill did not codify into law up-front disclosure of bag fees or fees incurred by consumers for changing or canceling their booking, as required in a new Department of Transportation (DOT) rule. But those changes will start phasing in next year.

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

"We're disappointed that Congress chose not to make DOT's rule on fee transparency the law of the land and concerned that this will make passenger rights more confusing," said PIRG Consumer Watchdog Teresa Murray. "We'll keep urging Congress and DOT to look for additional opportunities to enhance consumer protections."

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

New law will phase out fluorescent lighting

It's hard to address public health, consumer costs and environmental protection all at the same time. This new Illinois law does all three.

On Aug. 9, Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed the Clean Lighting Act into law, a plan to phase out fluorescent lighting in favor of cleaner, safer and more efficient LED bulbs.

LED bulbs use half as much energy as fluorescents. The new law will save Illinois consumers more than \$1.5 billion on utility bills, avoid 2.2 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions by cutting energy waste, and reduce mercury pollution by 419 pounds by 2050, according to analysis by the Appliance Standards Awareness Project.

Illinois PIRG is campaigning to reduce energy waste and inefficient systems that create pollution and increase bills. The Clean Lighting Act is a great step forward in tackling those issues. We should leave fluorescents in the past and move toward a cleaner and more efficient future.

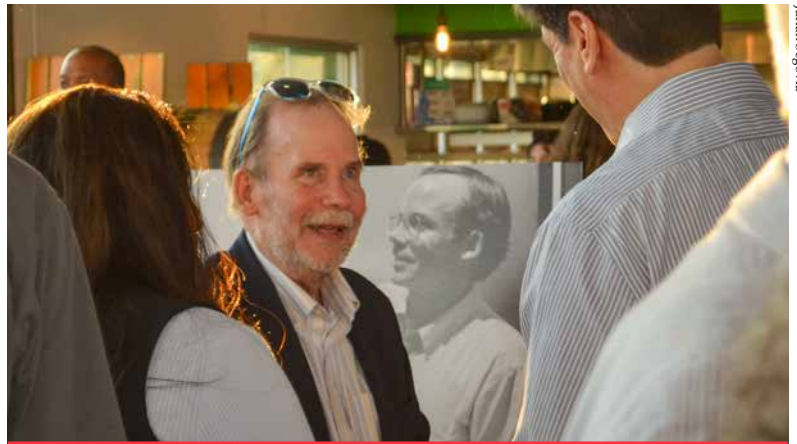
CONSUMER PROTECTION

50 years of challenging outrageous consumer abuses

In July, friends and colleagues came together in Washington, D.C., to celebrate PIRG's Ed Mierzewski's 50th anniversary of advocating for consumers and the public interest.

Ed oversaw PIRG's federal consumer program, helping to lead national efforts to improve consumer credit reporting laws, identity theft protections, product safety regulations, and more.

He was a co-founder of the coalition Americans for Financial Reform, which fought for the



Julian Segovia

Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act of 2010, including as its centerpiece the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). He was awarded the Consumer Federation of America's Esther Peterson Consumer Service Award in 2006, Privacy International's Brandeis Award in 2003, and numerous annual "Top Lobbyist" awards from The Hill and other outlets.

Over his long career, Ed has stood up for consumers over and over again, winning many protections along the way. Ed may be the reason why you can confidently buy a car that won't be a clunker, get a free credit report or freeze your credit to protect yourself against fraud, or get financial relief from the CFPB when you've been wronged in the marketplace.

Cheers to you, Ed, and thank you for being our consumer advocate.

Longtime PIRG consumer advocate and Senior Director of our Federal Consumer Program Ed Mierzewski celebrated his 50-year career in July.

HELP PROTECT HIS FUTURE
WITH YOUR INVESTMENTS



www.greencentury.com/divestbecause



Distributed by
UMB Distribution
Services, LLC. 11/21

Illinois PIRG
318 W Adams St. #1609
Chicago, IL 60606
(312) 544-4433

NON-PROFIT
ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BROCKTON, MA
PERMIT NO. 430

Illinois PIRG

CITIZEN AGENDA • FALL 2024



TOP STORY: You can help our campaign for microplastic-free waters

Tiny plastic pellets, called “nurdles,” are being dumped into our waterways. A new bill could make this microplastic pollution illegal.

UTILITIES WATCHDOG

We're calling for safer, cleaner energy

In July, Illinois PIRG launched its Safer Cleaner Energy outreach campaign, aiming to inform 6,000 Peoples Gas customer households about the Illinois Commerce Commission's (ICC) investigation into the Peoples Gas pipe replacement program.

In May, we successfully prevented a rate hike in a limited rehearing of the Peoples Gas rate case that would have burdened consumers with higher bills. While the ICC still approved a \$1.6 million increase, our lawyers were able to convince commissioners to reject the initial \$7.9 million increase proposal—all on top of the over \$300 million increase approved last fall.

But we still have a long way to go. Our ongoing investigation of the problematic Peoples Gas pipe replacement program has revealed that, despite



Illinois PIRG canvasser Damarian Miller addresses the media and the crowd during our campaign launch.

spending billions of dollars, the program has not achieved its public safety objectives. We're calling on the ICC to overhaul the program to actually make us safer while reducing costs and supporting the transition to clean energy.

We'll need the ongoing support and involvement of members like you to help fix this boondoggle.

FEATURED STAFF



Kimball Nelson

Abe Scarr: As Illinois PIRG state director, Abe is a lead advocate in Springfield and in the media for stronger consumer protections, utility accountability and good government. In 2017, he led a coalition to pass legislation to implement automatic voter registration in Illinois, winning unanimous support in the General Assembly for the bill. Previously, Abe worked as the state director for ConnPIRG, where he helped pass a landmark solid waste and recycling law.

Printed on recycled paper