



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.

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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."

CLEAN AIR

EPA funding for electric school buses means more kids will breathe easier

Diesel buses—which are linked to poor health and academic performance for children—make up a majority of school buses in the country. A recent victory, however, has taken a big step towards changing that.

On May 29, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced almost \$1 billion in additional funding from the Clean School Bus Program to school districts across the country. The money will replace 3,400 diesel buses with electric buses.

The funds will also pay for some more efficient gas or propane buses. Despite producing lower emissions than their diesel counterparts, these buses will still expose students to toxic pollution and contribute to the climate crisis. Electric buses remain the best choice for public health, the environment and school district budgets.

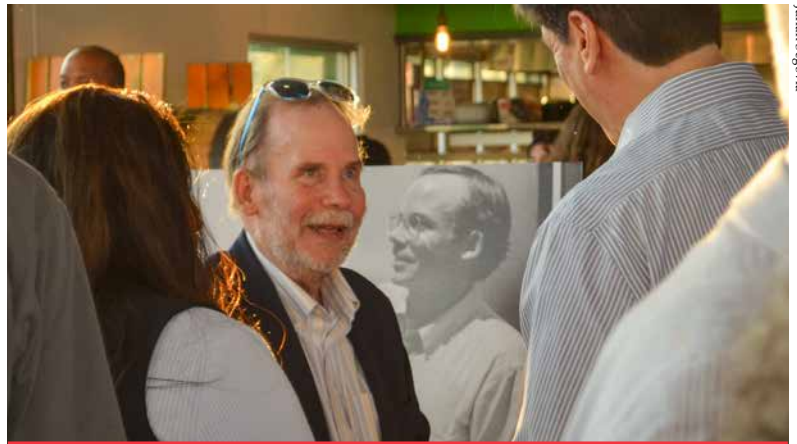
Isaac Bowers, federal legislative director for U.S. PIRG, thanked the Biden administration and the EPA for their action. "When parents wave their kids off to school they have a right to expect they will be in a safe and healthy environment," said Isaac. With this latest round of funding, that right is further secured.

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 Mierzwinski'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 pro-



Julian Sevoria

tections, product safety regulations, and more. He was a co-founder of the coalition Americans for Financial Reform, which fought for the 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.

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

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.

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Services, LLC. 11/21

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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.

BEYOND PLASTIC

You spoke up about plastic. Amazon is starting to listen.

Good news: On June 20, Amazon announced that by the end of this year, it will phase out plastic air pillows—those air-filled plastic film bags that show up in many of your packages—from its shipments in North America. Once it phases them out completely, the company will avoid the use of 15 billion air pillows per year.

The announcement came on the heels of another step Amazon took to reduce its use of plastic packaging.

In 2023, after receiving 138,000 petition signatures from supporters and members like you, Amazon announced its plans to phase out plastic-padded shipping bags and replace them with “more recyclable alternatives.”

Amazon is headed in the right direction, but there’s still more the retail gi-



Say good night, plastic air pillows.

ant can do. Amazon should phase out all single-use plastic packaging and commit to ambitious deadlines for doing so.

By raising our voices together, we can convince Amazon to continue to reduce its reliance on plastic packaging.

FEATURED STAFF



Kimball Nelson

Faye Park: *As president of PIRG, Faye oversees our national campaigns to protect consumers and enable Americans to lead healthier, safer and more secure lives. Faye began her public interest career as a student volunteer with MASSPIRG Students at Williams College, and then later worked with the Student PIRGs in California on campaigns to promote recycling and to help students register to vote.*

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