

WashPIRG



PIRG Right to Repair Campaign Director Nathan Proctor announcing a win in our campaign to make Microsoft products more repairable. Credit: Bloomberg TV

BEYOND PLASTIC

The Right to Repair and why it matters to Washington

Once upon a time, not that long ago, when you bought a product it came with a manual, it was relatively easy to repair, and its parts were widely available. Nowadays, not so much.

Manufacturers of electronics and appliances too often require consumers to go back to the manufacturer or their “authorized service providers.” These legal, digital and physical barriers make it all but impossible for the owner of the product to repair their own stuff.

The results include money wasted by consumers on new products they don’t actually need, as well as waste in the form of trash, much of it toxic. In Washington alone, we discard an estimated 3 million cell phones per year. Americans dispose of an estimated 416,000 cell phones every day, a manufacturing habit that uses 23.7 million tons of raw material annually.

That’s why we’re working to pass the Right to Repair bill in Washington—to give every consumer access to the parts, tools and service information they need to repair our stuff.

Right to Repair would be good for the planet

The Right to Repair bill would also be good for our environment. Consider this: 85% of the energy and climate impact associated with a smart-phone comes from manufacturing. Therefore, if every Washingtonian extended the life of their phone by just one year, it would be the climate pollution equivalent of removing nearly 15,000 cars off the road.

Being able to fix phones, computers and appliances instead of buying new would also save the average Washington household \$382 per year.

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RIGHT TO REPAIR IN WASHINGTON CONT.

Staff



A majority of Washingtonians support passing Right to Repair.

Washington residents want our state lawmakers to pass Right to Repair legislation—nearly 70%, according to a 2022 poll. Our campaign is building on our landmark success in neighboring Oregon, bringing together Washingtonians from all across the state and political spectrum—from environment advocates to business owners and farmers—to overcome manufacturer opposition and win lasting change.

Where Right to Repair stands now

In 2023, the Right to Repair bill came closer than ever to becoming part of Washington law, but it was one vote short of passing through a key committee. Since then, WashPIRG and coalition members have continued to build support from consumers, small business repair shops, public interest groups and environmental nonprofits.

In December, Washington's Right to Repair bill (HB 1933) was reintroduced into the state legislature for another attempt at passage in 2024. The bill, known as the Fair Repair Act, requires manufacturers to provide consumers and independent repair shops with the tools, parts, and information needed to repair electronic devices.

In January, that bill had its first hearing in the state legislature. Many people testified, including disability rights advocates, small business owners, students, and environmental activists. This public hearing demonstrated that there is broad support for Right to Repair, and 2024 is the year we're going to get it across the finish line. This year, the bill has been expanded beyond personal electronics to also include farm equipment, electric wheelchairs and household appliances.

A surging Right to Repair movement

We know what it takes to overcome opposition from companies like Apple and Amazon—WashPIRG has taken on the biggest special interests in Washington for decades and delivered real results. We've also gotten close to winning Right to Repair here in the last few years.

This year, we are ramping up efforts: we're working with the team that helped win Right to Repair in Oregon and expanding our campaign to make sure that Washingtonians can fix their own stuff.

It's simple: you should be able to do what you want with what you own. Right to Repair puts the power back in the hands of consumers while reducing waste, cutting climate pollution and bridging the digital divide. The time has come in Washington for Right to Repair.

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 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 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 Mierzewski 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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TOP STORY: The Right to Repair and why it matters to Washington

We should be able to fix the stuff we buy. Yet too often, companies make products that are hard to repair. That's why Washington needs the Right to Repair bill.

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-



PIRG staff and volunteers deliver more than 97,000 Valentine's Day petition signatures to Amazon headquarters in February 2023.

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.

Ricky Osborne