



Whole Foods was once an industry leader on curbing plastic waste. But in June 2020, environmental nonprofit As You Sow gave Whole Foods an 'F' on its plastic packaging policies. We're calling on Whole Foods to reclaim its spot at the top by making a commitment to phase out single-use plastic packaging at its stores. Credit: Raed Mansour via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0.

U.S. PIRG builds momentum toward zero waste

By Alex Truelove, Zero Waste campaign director with U.S. PIRG

The United States has a waste problem. We make too much, reuse too little and replace our things with new ones too quickly—practices that have led to massive amounts of wasted material headed to landfills and polluting our environment.

With your support, U.S. PIRG and our national network are campaigning for policies to tackle our waste problem. Here's just some of the work you've helped make possible:

U.S. PIRG urges Whole Foods to do its part to cut plastic pollution

Whole Foods isn't living up to its planet-before-profit reputation—but bold action to cut its plastic footprint could change that and help address our plastic waste problem.

In November 2020, U.S. PIRG launched a campaign calling for a commitment from Whole Foods to phase out single-use plastic packaging at its stores.

In June of last year, environmental group As You Sow gave the grocery chain an "F" for its policies on plastic packaging, material that contributes to the massive amounts of plastic waste overrunning our landfills, littering our communities and polluting our planet.

"As a company with a reputation for selling food that is good for people and the planet, Whole Foods can make a big dent in reducing plastic pollution," said U.S. PIRG Zero Waste Campaign Director Alex Truelove.

"Whole Foods Market once led the industry as the first U.S. grocer to eliminate plastic grocery bags at checkout in 2008. It's time they lead again."

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U.S. PIRG's Mission

When consumers are cheated or the voices of ordinary citizens are drowned out by special interest lobbyists, U.S. 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 exposés, grassroots organizing, advocacy and litigation. U.S. 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.

More than 130 organizations joined our research partners at U.S. PIRG Education Fund in sending a letter in March urging Whole Foods CEO John Mackey to commit to steps for reducing the company's plastic waste.

25 states actively pursue policies to secure consumers' right to repair

Policies that reduce waste, increase consumer choice and save families money should be no-brainers—and, fortunately, more states are beginning to see it that way.

Thanks in large part to the advocacy of our national network and coalition partners, 2021 is shaping up to be a big year for state legislation to guarantee consumers the right to fix their stuff. As the year began, 25 states introduced bills that would lower manufacturer restrictions on

Waste Is Out Of Fashion campaign takes on clothing waste

Globally, the equivalent of one dump truck filled with clothing and other textiles is sent to a landfill or incinerator every second.

That's why U.S. PIRG launched Waste Is Out Of Fashion in January 2021, a new campaign to reduce clothing waste—starting with banning an industry practice called “overstock destruction” that's perpetuating the problem. Clothing companies commonly destroy, incinerate or landfill unsold and unused clothing—their overstock—to make way for new merchandise.

“Clothing manufacturers and retailers should not be overproducing clothing just to throw it out,” said U.S. PIRG's Zero Waste campaign associate, Olivia Sullivan. “That's why we need state governments to take action.”

U.S. PIRG is calling on governors to cut down clothing waste by banning the destruction of overstock in states across the country. ■



Clockwise from top left: Olivia Sullivan, U.S. PIRG Zero Waste campaign associate; Jessica Schreiber, CEO and founder of FABSCRAP; author and journalist Elizabeth L. Cline; and Brooke Roberts-Islam, senior contributor at Forbes, discussed textile waste during a webinar hosted by U.S. PIRG.

service information, tools, parts and diagnostic software that consumers and independent repair shops need to make repairs.

The movement's new momentum has major implications for our country's waste crisis. Americans get rid of 416,000 cell phones per day, and only 15 to 20 percent of electronic waste is recycled. That could change if consumers were more empowered to extend the lives of their broken devices by taking them to the repair shop of their choice.

“We imagine a different kind of system, where instead of throwing things out, we reuse, salvage and rebuild,” said Nathan Proctor, director of U.S. PIRG's Right to Repair campaign. “We know it works—now it's time to win right to repair for all electronic products.”

NEWS BRIEFS

FEDERAL PRIORITIES

A look at PIRG's 2021 federal priorities

Every day, officials in Washington, D.C., make decisions that impact our health, our safety and our future. Our network's advocates have been crafting legislation, sharing research and bringing the voice of the public into these decisions.

Our ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic topped our list of 2021 federal priorities. Our network continued its calls for Congress and the Biden administration to provide sufficient testing, vaccines and personal protective equipment to save lives and end the pandemic.

Other top priorities include ensuring strong implementation of a law we won to prohibit surprise medical billing; continuing our campaigns for a healthy and safe 21st century transportation system; and advancing solutions to plastic pollution.

“In 2021, whether from our separate bubbles or back in our more traditional offices, we will con-

tinue to focus on bringing Americans together around policies that will improve our quality of life by making all of us healthier and more secure,” said U.S. PIRG President Faye Park. ■

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Nursing homes struggle through widespread staffing shortages amid the pandemic

Saving as many lives as possible during the coronavirus pandemic means prioritizing the health and safety of the nation’s most vulnerable populations.

But nursing homes around the country suffered from staffing shortages in 2020 as fatigue, COVID infections, PPE shortages and lack of child care impacted workers, according to January analysis from our research partners at U.S. PIRG Education Fund.

As the number of understaffed nursing homes increased from May to December 2020, more than 200,000 Americans resided in homes that reported shortages of nurses, aides or clinical staff at any given point through most of last year. By early December, the percentage of nursing homes reporting a shortage had reached 23 percent.

“This is a circular nightmare,” said Teresa Murray, U.S. PIRG Education Fund Consumer Watchdog. “Staff shortages existed before the pandemic and they just got worse as COVID-19 spread.”

U.S. PIRG Education Fund advised rapid approval of emergency funding for nursing homes and the prioritization of long-term care staff and residents for vaccination. ■

TRANSFORM TRANSPORTATION

Utility investments in electric school buses can help protect our kids and climate

How can utility companies help protect our kids’ health as well as our climate? The answer is surprisingly simple: by investing in clean, electric school buses instead of dirty diesel ones.

Our research partner U.S. PIRG Education Fund released a joint report with Environment America Research & Policy Center on Feb. 2 detailing



Scripps National News via The Denver Channel

steps utilities across the country can take to assist school districts in paying for zero-emission buses—an investment that can have huge long-term benefits for both schools and the utilities themselves.

Currently, most school buses in the U.S. run on diesel, a fossil fuel whose exhaust is linked to asthma, bronchitis and cancer and contributes to global warming.

“Getting to school shouldn’t include a daily dose of toxic air pollution,” said Ethan Evans, Electric Buses for America campaign associate with U.S. PIRG. “With school districts, lawmakers and utilities all working together, we can make the switch to all-electric school buses and give our kids a healthier ride to school.” ■

U.S. PIRG Education Fund’s Teresa Murray raised the alarm on nursing home staff shortages in an interview with Scripps National News, aired on The Denver Channel.



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TOP STORY:
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COVID-19 RESPONSE

Health professionals discuss vaccine communication with U.S. PIRG

This past winter, as the effort to vaccinate Americans against COVID-19 gained momentum, misinformation and confusion threatened to limit the effort's reach.

U.S. PIRG co-hosted a Facebook Live panel with Doctors for America on Jan. 19 to discuss how health providers, policymakers and the media can communicate accurate vaccine information to the public. The panel included Drs. Saad B. Omer, Rob Davidson and Christine Grady, as well as infectious disease and global health journalist Helen Branswell.

Topics included how to effectively communicate benefits of the vaccines to rural communities; the extensive testing and review that approved vaccines have undergone; and more.



Halfpoint via Shutterstock

As vaccination ramped up at the beginning of the year, vaccine hesitancy posed an obstacle to protecting the country against COVID-19.

"Vaccinating the country is a challenge, but we know that we can accomplish this feat by following the advice of medical experts," said U.S. PIRG Public Health Campaigns Director Matt Wellington, who moderated the panel. ■

THANKS TO YOU



Dear U.S. PIRG member,
U.S. PIRG, our national network and U.S. PIRG Education Fund work to bring Americans together around solutions for safer, healthier lives. With your support, we're working to slash plastic waste, educate Americans about the COVID-19 vaccine, and transform our transportation. Thank you for standing with us.

Faye A. Park

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President
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