



WashPIRG



2019 PROGRAM REPORT

Finding common ground and making real progress

Dear WashPIRG member,

Sometimes people ask if it's frustrating to be involved in political advocacy right now.

Sure, we've seen the divisions in our country deepen in recent years, and we've watched them harden in Washington, D.C., in ways that make positive action on issues that affect Americans' lives nearly impossible. That's frustrating.

But from the beginning, the approach of WashPIRG and our partner groups across the country has been to make progress wherever we can, whenever we can, as best we can—even when things are gridlocked in D.C. That's as true today as it was in 1971, when PIRG began.

Over the last few years, our national network has focused our energy at the state and local levels, winning changes that are documented in these pages.

For example, our Beyond Plastic campaign helped win bans on single-use plastics in cities and communities across the country. In 2019, six more states passed plastic bag bans and Maine, Maryland and Vermont became the first states to ban plastic foam food containers.

As we work to improve air quality and cut down on climate emissions, our Transform Transportation campaign is winning support for public transit, electric buses, electric cars and other clean, healthy alternatives to wasting billions on new or expanded highways.

To protect consumers, our PIRG Consumer Watchdog team continued to search out the hidden dangers in our homes, in the marketplace and at the grocery store. In 2019, U.S. PIRG Education Fund alerted the public to major food and product recalls, and sounded the alarm about unsafe inclined infant sleepers still in use at day cares.

Our leaders in Washington, D.C., should be doing much more on these and other issues. But we don't have time to brood about their failures. There are too many opportunities elsewhere to make progress for our health, our safety and the quality of our lives.

Thanks to you, our staff and other supporters are seizing every opportunity we can to win positive results for the public.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Faye A. Park".

Faye Park
For WashPIRG

P.S. Our staff quickly shifted to working remotely as the COVID-19 crisis swept the United States. But rest assured, we have continued our work to advocate for you and for a healthier, safer world.



26 million pounds of glyphosate are sprayed on school grounds, parks and gardens in the United States every year.



More than 47,000 people signed our petition to ban Roundup and other glyphosate-based products in states across the country last summer.

Working to ban Roundup

Since the World Health Organization labeled glyphosate, the main ingredient in Roundup, a probable human carcinogen, we've been warning the public and working to ban Roundup unless and until it can be proven safe.

In 2019, two more juries ruled that there was enough evidence to hold Roundup culpable for causing the cancers of three plaintiffs, making that three guilty verdicts since August 2018. More than 42,700 farmers, landscapers, home gardeners and others filed lawsuits claiming Roundup's makers knew of its cancer risk but failed to warn consumers. And the list of U.S. cities that have banned or restricted glyphosate-based herbicides continues to grow. But Roundup is still putting our health at risk, and more needs to be done.

Public education, member action strengthen call to ban Roundup

The more we educate the public about Monsanto's weed killer Roundup and other glyphosate-based products, the more support we find for banning them—the residue of which can be found practically everywhere.

In July 2019, WashPIRG and our national network kicked off a summer public education drive in 15 states.

"We're doing all we can to get the facts to legislators about why we should ban Roundup until and unless it's proven safe," said Kara Cook-

Schultz, director of our national network's Ban Roundup campaign. "The support and action of our members are making it easier to get local decision-makers to listen."

Over the course of the summer, our canvassers enlisted more than 47,000 citizens nationwide to join our call for state leaders to ban Roundup and other glyphosate-based products.

Studies find weed killer in beer and wine

The last thing you want to think about when you pour yourself a glass of wine or a cold beer is whether it contains even small amounts of a potentially carcinogenic weed killer.

But the use of glyphosate, the main ingredient in Monsanto's Roundup, is now so widespread that the chemical is found virtually everywhere—including, as a Feb. 22, 2019, report from our research partners at U.S. PIRG Education Fund found, in 19 of the 20 beer and wine products tested.

"No matter the efforts of brewers and vintners, [U.S. PIRG Education Fund] found that it is incredibly difficult to avoid ... that consumers will likely drink glyphosate at every happy hour and backyard barbecue around the country," Kara told USA Today.

WashPIRG and our national network are calling on federal, state and local officials to ban the use of glyphosate. We'll drink to that. ■



Starting with China in 2018, countries that used to accept U.S. waste imports are starting to send that waste back to where it came from. In 2019, Cambodia returned 3.5 million pounds of plastic waste back to the United States and Canada.

Our national network's Beyond Plastic campaign director, Alex Truelove, joined advocates from Environment America on Earth Day to call for a ban on polystyrene takeout containers.

Moving beyond plastic

With your support this past year, WashPIRG and our national network have made progress to move Washington and our country beyond single-use plastic by getting rid of the most harmful waste and stopping the use of things we truly don't need.

Not one, not two, but six more states banned single-use plastic bags

The number of statewide plastic bag bans in the U.S. multiplied six-fold in 2019, with Maine, New York, Vermont, Connecticut, Delaware and Oregon adding themselves to the list.

The states joined California in requiring retailers and grocers to replace single-use plastic bags with reusable or paper ones. Americans currently throw away 100 billion plastic bags every year, or 300 bags per person. We use these bags for just a few minutes, but they persist in the environment and impact public health for centuries to come.

"These states are leading the country in addressing plastic pollution," said our national network's Beyond Plastic campaign director, Alex Truelove. "Clearly, momentum is building on this issue. But these states cannot tackle our plastic pollution crisis alone."

Together with our national network, WashPIRG is running campaigns to ban single-use plastic

bags and other harmful plastics in Washington and across the country.

Maryland and Maine became the first states to ban plastic foam. Who's next?

In 2019, Maryland and Maine became the first states in the U.S. to put bans on foam food containers on the books, but other states aren't far behind.

On May 24, Maryland became the nation's second state to ban polystyrene foam cups and containers, after Gov. Larry Hogan let the bill become law without his signature. Maine passed a polystyrene foam ban earlier in the year. Maryland's ban will go into effect on July 1, 2020, with Maine's taking effect less than a year later.

"These two states did something historic in becoming the first in the country to ban single-use plastic foam," said Alex. "Other states should seize the opportunity and follow suit."

Legislatures in Oregon, New Jersey, Connecticut and Vermont are considering similar bans.

"Nothing we use for five minutes should be allowed to pollute our planet for hundreds of years," said Alex. "I'm happy to know Maine and Maryland agree. Who's next?" ■



In 2019, our national network's Transform Transportation campaign director, Matt Casale, advocated for states across the country to transition their polluting diesel bus fleets to clean, electric power.



Replacing all of America's school and transit buses with electric buses could avoid an average of 7.3 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions each year.

Transforming our transportation system

For our health, our safety and our children's future, we need to make our transportation systems cleaner and more efficient. That's why, in 2019, we launched our Transform Transportation campaign to reduce the need to drive and to electrify buses and cars—because we believe the easiest, cheapest and most pleasant ways to travel should also be the cleanest and healthiest.

Washington earns top grade for use of Volkswagen's 'Dieselgate' settlement funds

Three years after "Dieselgate," Washington scored high on how it's utilizing funds from Volkswagen's nearly \$3 billion settlement.

On May 23, 2019, U.S. PIRG Education Fund, the research and policy arm of our national network, released its Volkswagen Settlement Scorecard, which ranks all 50 states on how they're spending that money. Washington and Hawaii were the only states to receive top marks after spending as much as the settlement allowed on electric vehicle charging infrastructure and electrified mass transit. Only 15 states earned a C or better, and 14 states and Puerto Rico received failing grades.

Washington's performance earned praise from Gov. Jay Inslee. "WA received an A+ perfect grade because we're using ALL of the \$114 M we

got to advance electric transportation. Call us competitive, but we like being top of the class," he tweeted, including a link to the report.

WashPIRG applauds Washington's commitment to electric vehicles, and our 21st Century Transportation campaign is continuing its work to meet our changing transportation needs.

We backed a bill that could keep school buses from harming kids' health.

On the way to and from school every day, more than 25 million children breathe air polluted by the yellow buses that take them there.

Diesel pollution stunts the growth of kids' lungs and worsens asthma symptoms, and has also been linked to poorer academic performance. That's why, on June 6, 2019, seven U.S. senators introduced the Clean School Bus Act, which would commit \$1 billion over five years to help school districts transition to all-electric buses.

"Our kids shouldn't have to breathe dirty, dangerous air just to get to school," said our national network's Transform Transportation campaign director, Matt Casale. "We applaud and endorse this proposal because it will help protect the health of America's children." ■



U.S. PIRG Education Fund's Stop the Overuse of Antibiotics Campaign Director Matt Wellington (left) and advocates delivered more than 45,000 petition signatures asking the EPA to deny a proposal that would expand the spraying of antibiotics on citrus fields.

Stopping the overuse of antibiotics

The idea that our antibiotics might no longer work in the near future is alarming. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that at least 35,000 Americans die every year from drug-resistant infections—that's one person dying every 15 minutes. Other researchers suggest the number of deaths could be nearly five times as many. It's clear that we need to take urgent action to stop the overuse of antibiotics and keep our life-saving medicines working when we need them.

WashPIRG and our national network have been hard at work for the last five years to preserve the effectiveness of antibiotics, building a network of leading health professional advocates, and convincing the country's biggest restaurant chains to stop serving meat raised on the routine use of antibiotics. Here's some of the ongoing work you've helped make possible in 2019.

45,000 tell the EPA: Don't let growers spray antibiotics on citrus trees

Antibiotic overuse is becoming a global health crisis, threatening to make life-saving medicines ineffective. Yet the Trump administration is moving to allow growers to spray 650,000 pounds annually of these life-saving medicines on citrus trees.

On March 13, 2019, advocates from the research and policy arm of our national network, U.S. PIRG Education Fund, delivered signatures from more than 45,000 people asking the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to deny the proposal.

"The more you use antibiotics, the greater the risk that bacteria resistant to the drugs will flourish and spread. The bottom line is that the potential problems created by spraying massive amounts of strepto-

mycin on citrus fields could outweigh the original problem the EPA wants to solve,” said Matt Wellington, who directs U.S. PIRG Education Fund’s Stop the Overuse of Antibiotics campaign.

Spraying antibiotics on citrus fields is supposed to combat citrus greening, but it won’t cure or prevent the spread of the disease. On top of that, the EPA has clearly not fully considered the consequences of this unprecedented antibiotic use.

We launched a campaign calling on Wendy’s to ‘Hold the Antibiotics’ from its beef supply chain

How can the country’s third-largest burger chain help save the cornerstone of modern medicine? By buying only beef raised without the routine use of antibiotics.

On March 28, 2019, WashPIRG and our national network launched our campaign to convince Wendy’s to do just that. The CDC now estimates that 35,000 Americans die each year due to antibiotic-resistant infections. Large meat buyers such as Wendy’s can help keep our antibiotics effective by only sourcing beef from livestock farms that don’t overuse our medically important antibiotics.

“We can’t waste life-saving medicines to produce cheap beef. Wendy’s can use its buying power to help move the beef industry away from overusing antibiotics,” said Matt, who directs our national network’s Hold the Antibiotics: Wendy’s campaign.

Wendy’s no longer serves chicken raised on medically important antibiotics. But the chain earned only a D- on the 2019 Chain Reaction scorecard authored by our research partner U.S. PIRG Education Fund, which graded top burger chains on antibiotics use in their beef supply chains.

Superbugs Unplugged: U.S. PIRG launched a podcast about antibiotic resistance

Get ready for some alarming stories—which are all the more alarming because they’re true.

On Nov. 14, 2019, our partner U.S. PIRG and the Antibiotic Resistance Action Center (ARAC) of George Washington University launched “Superbugs Unplugged,” a podcast that will dive into the alarming issue of rising antibiotic resistance. Matt co-hosts the podcast with Dr. Lance Price of ARAC.

“[It’s just] totally baffling to me [that] we treat these drugs, not as the life-saving medicines that they are, but as tools in agriculture and wherever else we’re using them,” said Matt in the podcast’s inaugural episode. “I’m really excited for this podcast ... to be a forum for how we address this problem comprehensively.”

The approach of an era when, because of overuse, our antibiotics might no longer work, and what used to be common, treatable infections may become deadly, is truly terrifying. Our podcast will educate the public and promote solutions to avoid this nightmare scenario. ■



Students at our national network’s Hold the Antibiotics: Wendy’s campaign kickoff event in front of Wendy’s in New York City.



Matt Wellington and Dr. Lance Price kick off the first episode of the new podcast, “Superbugs Unplugged.”



PIRG Consumer Watchdog Adam Garber explains why inclined infant sleepers are so dangerous on NBC News.



U.S. PIRG Education Fund's report, "How Safe Is Our Food?," garnered widespread media coverage, alerting consumers to an increase in dangerous recalls.

PIRG Consumer Watchdog on the case

For more than 40 years, our national network has been warning consumers about hidden dangers and helping them to protect themselves. In 2019, our Consumer Watchdog team continued to be on the case: We alerted the public to major food, drug and product recalls, worked to get dangerous products off of store shelves, and more to keep consumers healthy, safe and secure.

How safe is our food? Not safe enough, says PIRG Consumer Watchdog team, and it's trending in the wrong direction.

Unsafe food recalls in the U.S. are trending the wrong way. From 2013 to 2017, they were up 10 percent overall, and up a whopping 83 percent for the most hazardous meat and poultry recalls.

These were the chief findings in 2019's "How Safe Is Our Food?" report, written by U.S. PIRG Education Fund—the research and policy arm of our national network—and co-released by WashPIRG on Jan. 17. The report reached millions of people through coverage on CBS This Morning, NBC News and USA Today.

"We need to be looking for these farm-to-fork preventative solutions that are logical," PIRG Consumer Watchdog Adam Garber told USA Today. "By doing that, we can protect people's health."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 1 in 6 people in the U.S. contract food-borne illnesses each year. To stem the problem, our national network's Consumer Watchdog team is calling for public health standards for agricultural water, a ban on salmonella in meat, and better recalls to get dangerous food out of people's homes.

PIRG Consumer Watchdog found deadly infant sleepers still in use at day cares

Even PIRG Consumer Watchdog Adam has to stay alert for dangerous products: He discovered recalled inclined sleepers at his infant son's day care in May 2019.

"They were still using the Fisher-Price Rock 'n Plays, which were recalled back in April," he told ABC Action News. Adam immediately alerted the day care to the recall and the Rock 'n Plays have since been removed. But the incident reveals fundamental flaws in our recall system.

"We do a great job, for the most part, of preventing the sale of devices or products that have been recalled, but we have a long way to go to remove them from people's homes and child care facilities."

According to a July 2019 U.S. PIRG Education Fund report that surveyed 376 child care facilities, 1 in 10 indicated they were still using at least one Fisher-Price Rock 'n Play. Inclined infant sleepers have led to the deaths of more than 73 infants and contradict medical guidance that babies should be placed on flat, hard surfaces with no restraints for sleeping.

U.S. PIRG Education Fund's work to raise the profile of these dangerous sleepers contributed

to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission taking action.

In the wake of the Capital One data breach, Ed Mierzwinski and Adam Garber explain how to protect your credit

Were you affected by the Capital One breach, one of the largest thefts of data from any bank to date?

On July 29, 2019, a massive data theft at Capital One was revealed, including the exposure of social security numbers and other data of more than 100 million people. So what can you do to protect yourself from this and other breaches? As Adam told The Wall Street Journal, "Freeze your credit immediately."

Ed Mierzwinski, senior director of our national network's federal consumer program, explained to C-SPAN's Washington Journal, "Your social security number and your birthday are ... [your] financial DNA. They have a very long shelf life."

Even if you've never had your identity stolen, it only takes one breach for hackers to cause you headaches and potential financial harm. Protecting yourself now can save you from significant financial issues down the road, even if you don't bank with Capital One.

Remember: "Freeze your credit immediately." ■



Ed Mierzwinski, senior director of our national network's federal consumer program, explains the importance of freezing your credit after the Capital One data breach on C-SPAN's Washington Journal.

Right now, the best way to protect yourself from new account identity theft is to freeze your credit at all three credit bureaus. You can find instructions at: <https://uspirg.org/feature/usp/credit-report-freeze>.

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