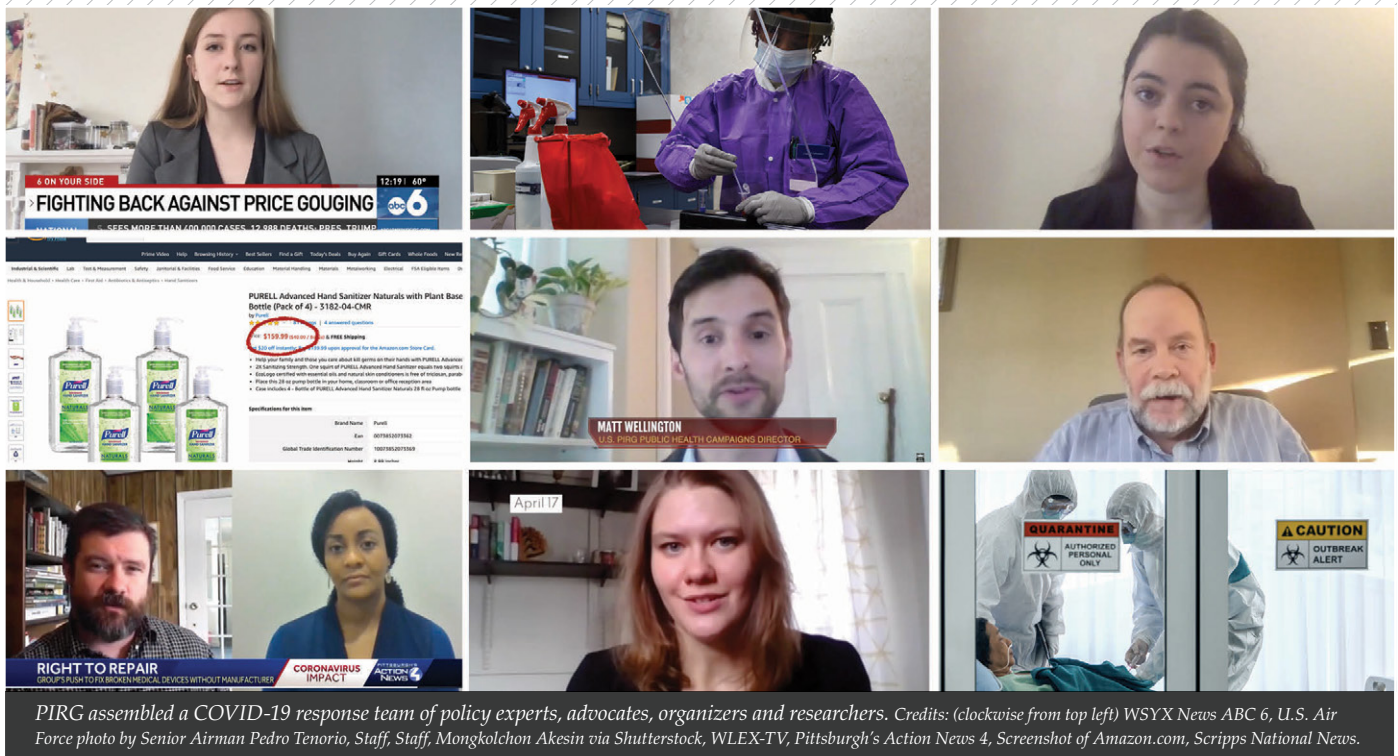


WashPIRG

Washington Public Interest Research Group
Citizen agenda: An update for members of WashPIRG

Summer 2020 • Vol. 37, No. 1 • More at <https://washpirg.org>



PIRG assembled a COVID-19 response team of policy experts, advocates, organizers and researchers. Credits: (clockwise from top left) WSYX News ABC 6, U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Pedro Tenorio, Staff, Mongkolkeha Akesin via Shutterstock, WLEX-TV, Pittsburgh's Action News 4, Screenshot of Amazon.com, Scripps National News.

Responding to the COVID-19 crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced Americans to confront harsh realities—from concern for the health and safety of themselves and their families, to the financial struggles brought on by mass layoffs and a dampened economy.

In response to the crisis, WashPIRG and U.S. PIRG Education Fund, the research and policy arm of our national network, have continued to work—from a safe social distance—for a healthier, safer world, calling for measures to improve our country's ability to discover and care for COVID-19 cases, to protect consumers from price gouging in the marketplace, and to increase production and distribution of vital medical supplies as rapidly as possible.

Ramping up our testing capacity

When the novel coronavirus made landfall in the United States, health experts warned that there

were not enough COVID-19 tests available for all who would need them. The inability to adequately test for the virus left health professionals and lawmakers with an incomplete picture as to the scope of the problem.

WashPIRG, U.S. PIRG Education Fund and our national network called on Adm. Brett Giroir, the head of the government's coronavirus testing response, to implement a national plan for scaling up our testing capacity as quickly as possible.

WashPIRG and U.S. PIRG Education Fund supported plans crafted by public health experts—including former Food and Drug Administration Commissioners David Kessler, M.D. and Scott Gottlieb, M.D.—for federal leadership to build this testing capacity. The plans included expanding labs and speeding up testing time, national coordination on large-scale purchasing

MEMBER RESOURCES

Read the latest news and sign up for email alerts on our public health and consumer campaigns at: <https://washpirg.org>

of testing supplies, and building systems to collect data and identify cases as fast as possible to prevent further spread of the virus.

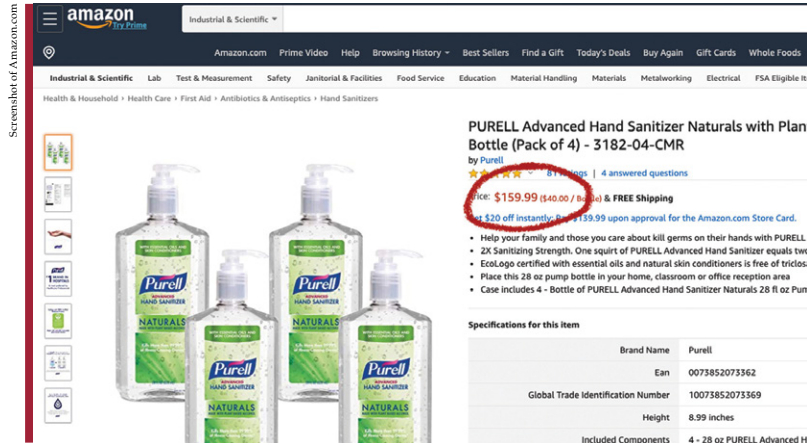
Preventing price gouging in a pandemic

As people rushed to buy hand sanitizer and other critical supplies early on in the outbreak,

called on President Trump to fully utilize the Defense Production Act (DPA) and to coordinate distribution of critical medical supplies directly to affected areas. Thousands have signed our network's petition calling on the president to use the DPA to double the amount of ventilators by mobilizing manufacturers in wartime-scale production efforts. On March 27, the president ordered General Motors to begin producing these lifesaving machines, but more needs to be done to fully meet demand.

Across the country, hospitals have struggled to get the supplies they need to protect frontline workers and care for COVID-19 patients. Our national network recruited 116 mayors and county executives to sign onto a letter urging the Trump administration to centrally coordinate procurement and distribution of essential supplies to everyone who needs them.

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended our way of life. As we confront these challenges, WashPIRG and U.S. PIRG Education Fund are committed to championing the policies that will best protect Americans' health, safety and well-being in this time of crisis. ■



In March, a four-pack of 28 ounce Purell hand sanitizer bottles was found selling for \$159 on Amazon.

U.S. PIRG Education Fund released groundbreaking research that revealed massive price gouging on Amazon. The report found that, in February, most surveyed hand sanitizers and face masks saw price surges of more than 50 percent above their 90-day averages. Even 1 in 6 products sold directly by Amazon—not third-party vendors—saw similar spikes.

More than 375,000 people have since joined WashPIRG and our national network in calling on Amazon and other major online marketplaces to implement safeguards that prevent prices from significantly increasing during states of emergency.

Even top officials and lawmakers have joined us in taking action to ensure consumers aren't taken advantage of during this time of crisis. In letters organized by U.S. PIRG Education Fund, attorneys general from 33 states called on Amazon, Walmart, eBay, Facebook and Craigslist to proactively put a stop to price gouging on their platforms. In April, 346 state legislators from 45 states signed a similar letter sent by U.S. PIRG Education Fund to those same companies.

Confronting our medical supply shortage

In response to ventilator supply shortages, WashPIRG and our national network have

WashPIRG's Mission

When consumers are cheated or the voices of ordinary citizens are drowned out by special interest lobbyists, WashPIRG 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. WashPIRG'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

FOOD SAFETY

How safe is our food? Produce recalls are down, but meat and poultry are sky-high

Did our food get safer in 2019? A U.S. PIRG Education Fund report finds mixed results.

While safety recalls for produce and processed food from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration have declined 34 percent since 2016—when new safety standards were implemented—recalls for meat and poultry have rocketed up 65 percent since 2013, finds the "How Safe is Our Food?" report.

Upticks in recalls don't necessarily mean our food has gotten less safe. In fact, they could mean our food safety systems have gotten better at identifying dangerous foods. But, says PIRG Consumer Watchdog Grace Brombach, that point is moot: Contaminations should be caught before recalls become necessary.

“Americans should be confident that their food is safe and not contaminated by dangerous bacteria like E. coli and salmonella,” said Grace.

U.S. PIRG Education Fund is advocating for improvements in our food safety systems—including increased testing, monitoring and traceability for pathogens. ■

BAN ROUNDUP

EPA review insists glyphosate does not cause cancer

Despite a wealth of evidence to the contrary, the Trump administration’s Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has declared that glyphosate is not a carcinogen.

On Jan. 30, the EPA finalized its review of the main active ingredient in Monsanto’s ubiquitous weedkiller, Roundup. Despite its designation as a probable human carcinogen by the World Health Organization’s cancer research agency, the EPA reaffirmed its stance that glyphosate is not a cancer agent.

The determination is at odds with the verdicts of three U.S. juries, which have awarded hundreds of millions in damages to four plaintiffs since 2018, after determining the weedkiller to be a substantial factor in causing their cancers.

The EPA’s failure to recognize glyphosate as a probable human carcinogen likely rules out a federal ban—an action that countries including Germany and France took in 2019. To protect the health of our communities, WashPIRG and our national network are continuing to lead efforts to ban Roundup in states and cities, unless and until it’s proven safe. ■

RIGHT TO REPAIR

WashPIRG helps win release of vital service information for ventilators

In March, as cases of COVID-19 mounted, it became vitally important that hospitals be able to return broken ventilators to service as quickly as possible. But, some manufacturers had restricted access to the repair documentation and service keys that biomedical repair technicians need to fix and maintain these lifesaving devices,



Pittsburgh's Action News 4

es, prompting action from WashPIRG and our national network.

More than 43,000 petition signers and state treasurers from five states joined our network’s call for manufacturers to release ventilator service information to help hospitals confront the pandemic. And in April, manufacturers including GE, Medtronic, Fisher & Paykal, and Zoll started to make that requested service information available online.

“I want to thank ventilator manufacturers for providing access to service documents,” said Nathan Proctor, our national network’s Right to Repair campaign director.

“We hope this also serves as an example of how restricting repair is harmful. When technicians can’t access service manuals, it creates unnecessary barriers to fixing lifesaving equipment.” ■

Our national network’s Right to Repair campaign director, Nathan Proctor, calls for manufacturers to release ventilator repair documentation and service keys on Pittsburgh’s Action News 4.



BE AN ADVOCATE FOR WASHINGTON’S FUTURE

Support our work in the public interest by including a gift to WashPIRG or WashPIRG Foundation in your will, trust or retirement accounts.

For more information call 1-800-841-7299 or send an email to: plannedgiving@washpirg.org

Source: Bruce via Flickr/PUREPORN.ORG

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TOP STORY:

Responding to the COVID-19 crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced Americans to confront harsh realities. In response to the crisis, WashPIRG has continued to work for a healthier, safer world.

BEYOND PLASTIC

New federal bill calls for U.S. to move beyond plastic

Addressing our plastic pollution problem means stemming the flow of plastic into our communities, landfills and environment.

On Feb. 11, U.S. Sen. Tom Udall and U.S. Rep. Alan Lowenthal introduced legislation that would re-envision how we handle our plastic waste. The first measure outlined in the proposed Break Free From Plastic Act is simple: make less of it. The legislation would phase out unnecessary single-use plastics, which overburden our landfills and pollute our environment. The legislation also provides funding for recycling and composting infrastructure, and would shift the financial burden of managing waste and recyclables from town and city governments to manufacturers.



Alex Truelove and U.S. Rep. Alan Lowenthal applaud the introduction of sweeping plastic waste legislation.

“We’re inundated by plastic pollution, but we make more each year,” said Alex Truelove, our national network’s Beyond Plastic campaign director. “Finally, we have a federal bill that offers real solutions, drawing from successful ordinances across the globe.” ■

THANKS TO YOU



Dear WashPIRG member,
From a safe social distance, we’re continuing our work for a healthier, safer world. From responding to the COVID-19 crisis, to improving our food safety systems, to banning toxic weed killers and harmful single-use plastics—your support is what makes it all possible.

Thank you,

Faye A. Park

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President, National Office
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