



SAFEGUARDING PUBLIC HEALTH

Clean air, clean water and safe food are the most basic necessities of a healthy life. Yet, from “The Jungle” of Upton Sinclair to Love Canal, corporations and the government have a long track record of gambling with the public’s health. The PIRGs take action to protect the American public against threats to the purity of our air, water and food. We expose dangerous industrial and agricultural practices. We promote tough, pragmatic policies to curtail pollution, and call for cleanup where health-threatening pollution has already occurred. And we prod government and industry to find safer ways of doing business in order to prevent future pollution.



1972 - MPIRG

Asbestos Ban: MPIRG, local unions and Minnesota’s AFL-CIO conduct a study that leads to a ban on the use of asbestos as insulation material in new construction.

1983 - NJPIRG

Right To Know: NJPIRG and a labor-environment coalition win the Worker, Community Right to Know About Toxics Act, requiring industry to publicly report use, storage and transport of toxic chemicals.

1983 - MoPIRG

State Superfund: MoPIRG spearheads passage of the Missouri Superfund Law, creating a fund to pay for the non-federal share of cleanups plus investigation and assessment of potential hazardous waste sites.

As nation wakes to toxic legacy, Washington state voters take the initiative

Generations of irresponsible use and disposal of toxic chemicals had left a legacy of pollution across the country by the mid-1980s. In Washington state, for instance, officials acknowledged that one out of every six state residents may have been affected by problems caused by toxic waste.

In 1987, WashPIRG and other citizen groups began to lobby for a tough new law to generate money for toxic cleanups and deter future pollution. In May 1987, with the measure stalled in the Legislature, WashPIRG joined with a broad coalition of groups – including environmentalists, organized labor and representatives of both political parties – to put the plan on the 1988 ballot. Over the next several months, the coalition collected 217,000 petition signatures – enough to put the proposal before the voters – with WashPIRG accounting for 50,000 of the total.

But even as signature-gathering was ongoing, the Legislature was adding a new wrinkle to the effort. Meeting in special session, the Legislature adopted a much weaker toxic waste cleanup proposal, which would accompany the WashPIRG-backed Initiative 97 on the ballot.

With two cleanup initiatives side-by-side on the ballot, and with oil companies and major industries preparing to spend vigorously in support of “Alternative 97B,” WashPIRG and other backers of Initiative 97 faced an uphill battle. Throughout the summer of 1988, WashPIRG canvassers spoke to residents across the state about the upcoming campaign. As Election Day approached, WashPIRG released reports on toxic waste, and, along with coalition partners, held weekly news conferences

and visits with editorial boards across the state. In the final days of the campaign, more than 1,000 volunteers went door-to-door, distributing more than 200,000 pieces of literature in support of I-97.

In the end, voters approved Initiative 97 with 56 percent of the vote. Media reports at the time attributed the victory to strong support for the campaign’s “Tough Law, Tough Fines, No Deals” message.

In the years since, the state of Washington has identified more than 9,000 potential hazardous waste sites and cleaned up nearly 5,000. The director of the state’s Department of Ecology, Tom Fitzsimmons, said in 2002 that “[t]hanks to our voters, Washington has probably the most comprehensive and successful toxic-cleanup program in the country. We have an ongoing, steady funding source that has enabled us to pioneer new cleanup technologies and support local communities through some long-term difficult cleanup projects.”



▲ *With a competing, weaker question on the ballot, WashPIRG relied on volunteers to get out its message: “Tough Law. Tough Fines. No Deals.”*



◀ *WashPIRG Director Wendy Wendlandt led the organization’s campaign to win a strong new toxics cleanup law in Washington state.*

1985 – MASSPIRG

Pollution Penalties: MASSPIRG wins a law empowering state officials to fine illegal polluters up to \$25,000 a day without bringing them to court.

1986 – State PIRGs

Superfund: In their first federal victory, the state PIRGs successfully campaign to strengthen the nation’s Superfund law, winning creation of the national toxics release inventory.

1990 – State PIRGs

Clean Air Act: The state PIRGs provide critical grassroots support to win U.S. House and Senate approval of tough Clean Air Act amendments cutting smog and toxic air emissions.

Massachusetts applies an ounce of prevention to toxic pollution



▲ *Voter support for a sweeping, MASSPIRG-backed 1986 hazardous waste cleanup proposal helped pave the way for the Toxics Use Reduction Act. Here, MASSPIRG's Mindy Lubber speaks to the press about the 1986 ballot initiative, which won 74 percent of the popular vote.*



▲ *Hazardous waste program director Bill Ryan releases a 1983 MASSPIRG report on the effects of toxic dumping on drinking water. Ryan was the chief architect of MASSPIRG's cutting-edge toxics use reduction proposal, which was enacted in 1989.*

With the discovery of toxic contamination and serious health problems in towns such as Love Canal, N.Y., and Woburn, Mass., concerns about toxic waste gripped the nation in the late 1970s and early 1980s. But the wave of new laws that resulted – including many supported by state PIRGs – dealt only with how to clean up toxic waste once it had been created.

In 1983, MASSPIRG's Bill Ryan began to look for a new approach, one capable of reducing the generation of hazardous waste. Eventually, he came to focus on the need to reduce the use of toxic chemicals – a cutting-edge approach that would protect the public, workers and the environment against the full range of threats posed by toxics, from routine discharge to accidental spills.

Momentum behind the new approach began to build after 1986, the year that voters approved – by a record margin – a MASSPIRG-backed initiative to speed the cleanup of toxic waste sites. MASSPIRG's success with the initiative led some legislators and industry representatives to fear that the toxics use reduction proposal would also end up on the ballot.

In 1989, following a two-year insider advocacy and grassroots campaign and the release of a series of MASSPIRG reports, events came to a head. Legislative leaders convened a series of meetings between environmental advocates and representatives of industry to hammer out a compromise.

“We knew right away what the most contentious issues were,” said Margie Alt, who represented MASSPIRG. Among those issues were MASSPIRG's proposed phase-outs of the most dangerous chemicals; the phase-outs were eventually dropped in exchange for industry's support for the essential use reduction package.

“Although we gave up these proposals in the negotiations, by staking out this territory and having the threat of a ballot initiative in the background, we were able to compromise, yet still end up with a strong law,” said Ryan.

The law that resulted – the Toxics Use Reduction Act – represented a landmark achievement. For the first time, industries were required to publicly disclose their use of toxic chemicals and plan for future reductions.

The result has been a significant reduction in the use of toxic chemicals in Massachusetts. Since 1991, use of “more hazardous” chemicals has declined by 20 percent. And many companies have realized cost savings by switching to cheaper – and safer – alternatives. The measure served as a model for similar proposals later adopted following PIRG campaigns in New Jersey and Oregon.



► *When Gov. Michael Dukakis (right) signed the Toxics Use Reduction Act, he invited MASSPIRG's Margie Alt, chief advocate for the bill, and bill sponsor Rep. Geoff Beckwith (left) to speak.*

1990 - PIRGIM

Polluter Pays: PIRGIM wins the nation's toughest polluter pays legislation in Michigan. By 1995, this law had saved taxpayers \$100 million by forcing polluters to pay for the cleanup of toxic waste.

1990 - ConnPIRG

Long Island Sound: A ConnPIRG-led coalition wins legislation enabling authorities to set higher fines for illegal polluters, following a ConnPIRG exposé of rampant industrial pollution of Long Island Sound.

1991 - NJPIRG

Pollution Prevention: NJPIRG wins passage of New Jersey's Pollution Prevention Act, helping reduce hazardous waste generation in the state by 50 percent over the next 10 years.

N.J. polluters must pay, thanks to the Clean Water Enforcement Act

From its founding in 1972, NJPIRG has worked to improve the deplorable state of New Jersey's waterways. For decades, refineries and chemical plants had dumped their wastes into the state's rivers and streams virtually unchecked – making fishing and swimming in many waterways not just unsafe, but unthinkable.

Beginning in 1974, teams of NJPIRG volunteer “streamwalkers” put on hipwaders and walked alongside waterways, looking for – and often finding – evidence of illegal water pollution. But despite the ample evidence NJPIRG collected from its streamwalks (and even from companies' own discharge reports), state and federal environmental officials refused to crack down on illegal polluters. NJPIRG tried a variety of strategies – research reports, establishment of a 24-hour water pollution hotline, and even lawsuits against major polluters – to bring about a more vigorous government response, with limited success.

By the mid-1980s, according to former NJPIRG director and current general counsel Ed Lloyd, “we were looking for systemic change – mandatory minimum fines that would be required of all companies that violated their discharge permits.”

The opportunity for change would come beginning in 1988. In February of that year, NJPIRG released a startling report finding that, of 6,000 illegal pollutant discharges in New Jersey over a two-year period, only three percent resulted in a government response. Then, that summer, sewage and medical waste washed onto the Jersey Shore, closing beaches and



▲ NJPIRG volunteer “streamwalkers” inspect a New Jersey stream for evidence of illegal pollution in 1979.

damaging the state's tourism industry.

The two events brought new momentum to NJPIRG's campaign for the Clean Water Enforcement Act – a tough package of mandatory fines for serious water polluters. Over the next two years, NJPIRG built a coalition of more than 100 organizations behind the bill – including groups of outdoors enthusiasts, religious groups and Jersey Shore businesses. NJPIRG staff researched and released a series of reports targeting pollution problems in the districts of state legislators. And activists toured the state with an 18-foot-high fish named Wanda that had been built by Rutgers art students and quickly became the campaign's mascot.

Following a bruising campaign, Gov. Jim Florio signed the Act into law in May 1990. A decade later, New Jersey has gone from near the top to near the bottom of the list of states for industrial non-compliance with the Clean Water Act. The law also served as a model for a CALPIRG-supported law adopted in California in 1999.

▼ NJPIRG Program Director Rob Stuart speaks at an Asbury Park ceremony to mark the signing of the New Jersey Clean Water Enforcement Act by Gov. Jim Florio (seated, right).



1992 – CoPIRG

Clean Air: CoPIRG helps win the Colorado Clean Air Act, requiring far more disclosure of air emissions than federal law. This law is widely credited with diminishing Denver's infamous “Brown Cloud.”

1994 – Florida PIRG

Hazardous Waste Incinerator: A Florida PIRG campaign successfully stops the permitting of the state's first planned hazardous waste incinerator.

1999 – MASSPIRG

Dump Diesel: Massachusetts adopts a program to reduce diesel pollution from the state's trucks and buses by 90 percent by 2005 after a series of MASSPIRG-sponsored community forums.

CALPIRG alerts parents to pesticides in schools, winning right-to-know law

Californians have long been concerned about how the millions of pounds of pesticides sprayed each year on the state's farms might affect their children's health. But in 1998, CALPIRG advocate Jonathan Kaplan asked a question few had considered: what about pesticide use in schools?

Kaplan and other CALPIRG staff surveyed 50 California school districts and found that a shocking 87 percent of the districts reported using pesticides linked to cancer or other serious health problems on school grounds. Moreover, getting details from many school officials was like pulling teeth. If CALPIRG's professional researchers couldn't get the information quickly or easily, how could parents?



CALPIRG worked with its longtime partners on pesticide issues – groups such as Pesticide Watch, Pesticide Action Network, Physicians for Social Responsibility and the coalition Californians for Pesticide Reform – to create the Healthy Schools Campaign. The immediate goal: to require that parents be informed about what pesticides were being used in their children's schools.

In 1999, both houses of the Legislature passed CALPIRG-supported legislation

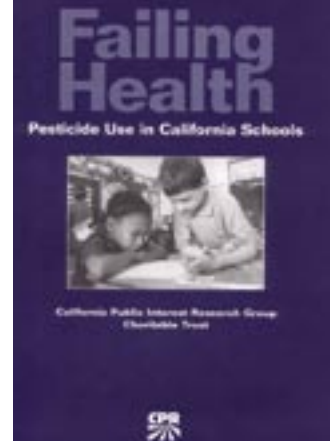
to assert and safeguard parents' right to know about pesticide applications. But Gov. Gray Davis vetoed the bill, citing the high cost of notifying parents.

In 2000, advocate Teri Olle and others tried again, mobilizing a larger coalition than ever, including groups such as the Parent-Teacher Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the California Medical Association. In addition, CALPIRG issued an updated report on pesticide use in schools, helped organize a lobby day in which 40 citizens traveled to Sacramento to speak to their representatives, and worked behind the scenes to ease Gov. Davis' concerns about the bill.

By demonstrating the severity of the problem and developing broad support for the measure, CALPIRG and its partners were able to win enactment of the Healthy Schools Act in September 2000. The law gives parents more tools to protect their children against unwanted pesticide exposures and creates new resources for schools to reduce their use of pesticides.

Just as importantly, according to CALPIRG alumna Joan Clayburgh, who played a leading role in the effort as campaign director of Californians for Pesticide Reform, the Healthy Schools Campaign brought new participants into the pesticide reform movement.

"Leading health and children's groups were strongly invested in this bill and in understanding pesticide issues," said Clayburgh, who now directs the Sierra Nevada Alliance. "There were no strong relations before this effort. It was a great



▲ *Failing Health* – a report written by CALPIRG Charitable Trust's Jonathan Kaplan and issued in conjunction with Californians for Pesticide Reform – documented the widespread use of dangerous pesticides in California schools.

◀ CALPIRG Toxics Program Director Teri Olle played a leading role in securing passage of the Healthy Schools Act. Here, she speaks at a press conference to educate parents and school officials about the new law.

▼ The red "Radio Flyer" wagon became a symbol of the Healthy Schools Campaign.



1999 – CALPIRG

Mandatory Minimum Penalties: CALPIRG successfully advocates for California's Clean Water Enforcement and Pollution Prevention Act, setting mandatory minimum penalties for Clean Water Act violations.

1999 – Illinois PIRG

Diesel Emissions: Gov. Ryan signs into law an Illinois PIRG-backed proposal requiring diesel trucks registered in the Chicago and East St. Louis areas to pass annual emissions tests.

2000 – MASSPIRG

Ocean Pollution: MASSPIRG wins a beach pollution law, requiring statewide, standardized water quality testing and public notification within 24 hours of test results.

States make progress against power plant pollution through PIRG-backed emission limits

Power plants are among the nation's largest sources of health-threatening air pollution. So why are many of the nation's oldest and dirtiest plants operating under pollution limits set when Jimmy Carter was president? The answer is a notorious loophole in the Clean Air Act – one that PIRGs have sought to close, with some success, at the state level.

In North Carolina, NCPIRG worked with allies in the public health and environmental communities to make power plant pollution a major issue in the 2000 elections. When the issue came before the Legislature in 2001, coalition allies such as the American Lung Association and North Carolina Medical Society highlighted the importance of the proposed plan for protecting public health. Eventually, the Legislature passed a bill with tough caps on smog and soot releases from power plants, which Gov. Michael Easley signed into law in June 2002.

Up north, MASSPIRG was working through administrative channels to win its own power plant cleanup plan. In 1998, MASSPIRG filed a petition under an obscure state law that allows anyone to petition any state agency to adopt a regulation. The petition led to a commitment from Gov. Paul Cellucci to clean up the plants. For the next two years, MASSPIRG pressed Cellucci to make good on his promise, testifying at hearings, negotiating with power plant owners, and releasing reports on the impact of power plant pollution on public health. In April 2001, Cellucci's successor, Gov. Jane Swift, finalized regulations that in-

cluded the first-ever state-imposed limits on power plant emissions of mercury and carbon dioxide.

In Georgia, public health advocates took a different approach. All 11 of the state's coal-fired power plants are owned by a single corporation: Southern Company. U.S. PIRG (and later, the newly formed Georgia PIRG) launched a media and public relations campaign demanding that Southern Company do its share to alleviate the Atlanta region's chronic smog problems. PIRG advocates worked with public health and religious groups to educate the public while using such unusual tactics as a billboard campaign and a shareholder resolution to capture the company's attention. While Southern Company has yet to act, the state of Georgia has, requiring the Atlanta area's five power plants to reduce emissions of smog-forming nitrogen oxides by 75 percent during summer months.

PIRGs have also helped win reductions in power plant pollution in Pennsylvania, Colorado, Connecticut, New Jersey and Illinois, and have been among the leading critics of federal proposals to ease pollution standards for power plants.



▲ *MASSPIRG Legislative Program Director Rob Sargent directed the successful campaign for the cleanup of the state's five dirtiest power plants.*



▲ *Georgia PIRG focused the public's attention on Southern Company, owners of the South's dirtiest power plants. Here, Georgia PIRG advocate Jen Giegerich (far left), the state PIRGs' field director Adam Ruben (third from right) and others launch the campaign.*

◀ *Media coverage of NCPIRG-released reports on the health impacts of power plant pollution helped spur passage of a law to cap smog and soot releases from the plants. Here, NCPIRG director Elizabeth Ouzts speaks at a public hearing on the issue in Raleigh.*

2000 - WashPIRG

Toxics Ban: WashPIRG and coalition partners persuade Washington state to adopt a 20-year plan to eliminate all emissions of persistent bioaccumulative toxics such as lead and mercury.

2000 - WISPIRG

Polluted Runoff: WISPIRG helps win toughest-in-the-nation clean water standards for controlling polluted runoff from agriculture, urban areas, construction sites and roads.

2002 - Iowa PIRG

Corporate Farms: Iowa PIRG helps pass a law to limit livestock pollution from corporate farms, setting standards to protect air and water quality.