California’s progress against plastic waste

The Legislature is stepping up in the Golden State, but more work is still necessary

California recently took significant steps toward becoming a state “Beyond Plastic.” Both the Senate and Assembly passed CALPIRG-backed bills that would guarantee much more of the single use plastic and packaging we use is actually recycled.

AB 1080, introduced by Assemblymember Lorena Gonzalez, and SB 54, introduced by Sen. Ben Allen, would establish state targets to reduce single-use plastic and packaging waste by 75 percent by 2030.

CalRecycle would also be given the authority to implement regulations on manufacturers to help ensure the state stays on track to meet those targets, either through reduced use, or increased recycling and composting.

This legislative action is very necessary. Last fall, our research partner CALPIRG Education Fund released “The State of Waste” in California, which found that Californians throw away six pounds of trash every day. That equates to almost 2,200 pounds every year—roughly the weight of a subcompact car. To make matters worse, the state has been trending in the wrong direction. This report showed that since 2012, disposal per resident has increased from 5.3 to 6 pounds, while the recycling rate has decreased from 50 percent to 44 percent.

Although California’s recycling rate remains above the national average of 34.7 percent, its results are well below the state’s 2020 goal of 75 percent.

This is a statewide problem. In fact, every major California city has failed to improve its reduction of waste since 2012.
We should all be concerned about the rise in plastic and packaging waste. This is also a worldwide problem, evidenced by the fact that, of the 6.3 billion metric tons of plastic waste humans have created, less than nine percent of it has been recycled. Roughly 8 million tons of plastic waste seeps into our oceans every year.

California used to export much of its plastic waste to other countries, but that’s become increasingly difficult. This spring, Malaysia announced that it will be the latest South Asian country to stop accepting imported plastic scrap. It will send some 3,000 metric tons of this plastic waste back to where it came from, including the United States.

But California has the potential to push back on this trend. With the promise of a statewide single-use plastic bag ban—and Assemblymember Ian Calderon’s “straws on request bill” last year—there’s growing political support in favor of more comprehensive approaches to tackling plastic waste.

California used to export much of its plastic waste to other countries, but that’s become increasingly difficult. This spring, Malaysia announced that it will be the latest South Asian country to stop accepting imported plastic scrap. It will send some 3,000 metric tons of this plastic waste back to where it came from, including the United States.

Unfortunately, the plastics industry and manufacturers are trying to counter this work by opposing these and other legislative efforts to crack down on single-use plastics.

Industry adversaries paid signature gatherers to put Prop 67 on the ballot in 2016 in an attempt to roll back California’s ban on single-use plastic bags, and industry opposition successfully killed SB 705 in the last legislative session, which would have banned the use of polystyrene, also known as Styrofoam, for food containers.

But, at the time of this writing, we are hopeful these bills will be signed into law, and we can begin to get California’s plastic recycling rates up to 75 percent as quickly as possible. See our website for the latest on these bills and more on our campaign to move beyond plastic.

**NEWS BRIEFS**

**MAKE IT TOXIC FREE**

**CALPIRG sponsors legislation to finally get the ‘toxic twenty’ chemicals out of your makeup**

In 2019, it’s unthinkable that toxic lead, mercury, formaldehyde and even asbestos would be found in everyday items such as makeup. Yet there they are.

On March 19, Assembly member Al Muratsuchi introduced Assembly Bill 495, which would halt the sale of cosmetics containing the “toxic twenty” chemicals—20 chemicals that are known to cause cancer, damage reproductive health and disrupt hormones. The bill is co-sponsored by CALPIRG and Environmental Working Group.

“No one would knowingly use face powder contaminated with asbestos, lipstick that contains lead, or baby shampoo spiked with formaldehyde,” said Emily Rusch, executive director of CALPIRG. “This bill gives Californians greater assurance that the products we use every day on our bodies are not causing more harm than good.”

While more than 40 other countries heavily regulate the use of toxic chemicals in cosmetics and personal care products, the U.S. government
NEWS BRIEFS

currently exercises almost no oversight. The bill would send a clear signal to cosmetics and personal care companies that it’s long past time to make safer products for Californians and the rest of the country.

ZERO WASTE

What a waste: At least 30% of trash could be composted instead of buried or burned

Each year, America landfills and incinerates enough organic material to fill a line of 18-wheelers stretching from New York to Los Angeles 10 times over.

On June 13, CALPIRG released “Composting in America,” a report by our national research partner U.S. PIRG Education Fund, which shows that we could be composting at least 30 percent of our waste stream—and in the process pulling more carbon out of the atmosphere, returning more nutrients to our soil, and using fewer toxic chemical fertilizers.

“One person’s trash is another person’s treasure—especially when that trash can be turned into compost,” said Faye Park, president of U.S. PIRG Education Fund. “We constantly say to reduce, reuse and recycle. By reusing food waste and yard waste, we reduce our garbage and the negative impact it has on the earth and our health.”

“With composting, our organic waste—food scraps, paper towels, yard trimmings—could help us instead of hurt us,” said Alex Truelove, Zero Waste campaign director for U.S. PIRG Education Fund.

HOLD THE ANTIBIOTICS: WENDY’S

We’re 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, CALPIRG and our national network launched our campaign to convince Wendy’s to do just that. A new estimate suggests up to 162,000 Americans die from antibiotic-resistant infections every year. If we want to keep antibiotics working, companies such as Wendy’s need to stop sourcing beef from large, industrial livestock operations that overuse 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 Wellington, national director of our Stop the Overuse of Antibiotics campaign.

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

BE AN ADVOCATE FOR CALIFORNIA’S FUTURE

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

For more information call 1-800-841-7299 or send an email to: plannedgiving@calpirg.org
Public education, member action strengthen call to ban Roundup

The more we educate the public about Monsanto’s weedkiller, Roundup, the more support we find for banning the product—the residue of which can be found practically everywhere, from breakfast cereal to ice cream. In July, CALPIRG and our national network kicked off a summer public education drive in 15 states.

“Ever since the World Health Organization determined Roundup’s main ingredient, glyphosate, is a probable carcinogen, we have been warning the public,” said our Ban Roundup Campaign Director Kara Cook-Schultz.

“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 CALPIRG Executive Director Emily Rusch. “The support and action of our members are making it easier to get state decision-makers to listen.”

Over the course of the summer, our canvassers enlisted more than 14,400 citizens statewide and 47,000 nationwide to join our call on state leaders to ban Roundup.