

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, CALPIRG 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.

CALPIRG, 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.

CALPIRG 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

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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,

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, CALPIRG 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. ■

NEWS BRIEFS

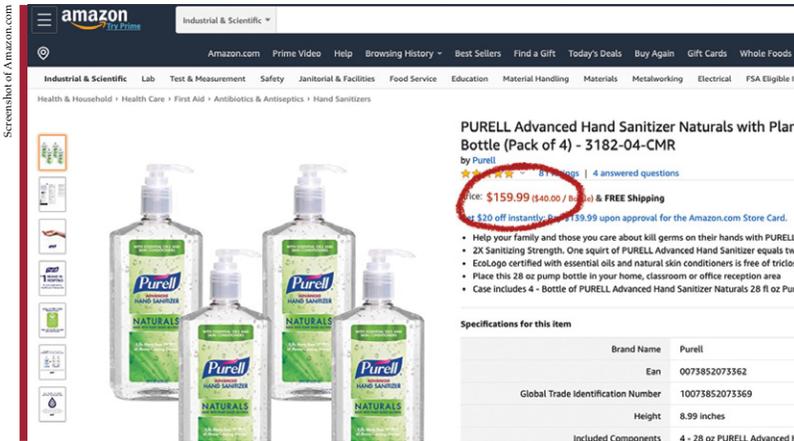
GET THE LEAD OUT

San Diego has a new plan to get the lead out of school drinking water

In 2017, San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) adopted the most ambitious plan in the nation to get the lead out of its drinking water. Now, it's doubling down on that plan.

On Feb. 26, SDUSD's board of education voted to fully adopt a standard to allow no more than 1 part per billion (ppb) of lead in the drinking water in its schools—the standard recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

SDUSD's decision comes after the completion of its pilot remediation program at Clay Elementary School, which found success in tearing out old and contaminated fixtures and replacing them with new lead-free fountains and water filling stations.



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 CALPIRG 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, CALPIRG and our national network have called

CALPIRG's Mission

When consumers are cheated or the voices of ordinary citizens are drowned out by special interest lobbyists, CALPIRG 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. CALPIRG's mission is to deliver persistent, results-oriented public interest activism that protects consumers, encourages a fair, sustainable economy, and fosters responsive, democratic government.

“As we can see from the leadership displayed at Clay Elementary, it is possible to get the lead out and protect children from this preventable toxic exposure,” said Laura Deehan, CALPIRG Education Fund’s public health advocate.

CALPIRG Education Fund is encouraging other California school districts to join SDUSD in adopting a 1 ppb lead remediation standard. ■

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. ■

STUDENT PIRGS

CALPIRG Students wins American Climate Leadership Award

People looking for cause for hope in the next generation need look no further than the student volunteers, interns and leaders of CALPIRG Students.

On March 27, CALPIRG Students was announced the winner of ecoAmerica’s 2020



Footage by J. Herron

American Climate Leadership Awards in a virtual ceremony.

“The students ran and won a campaign for a University of California system-wide commitment for 100 percent renewable energy,” said former Environmental Protection Agency Administrator and current CEO of the Natural Resources Defense Council, Gina McCarthy.

“It’s the farthest-reaching commitment [yet], with more campuses involved than any other commitment we’ve seen across the country to date.”

Students involved in PIRG chapters on more than 65 campuses in 19 states are also working to persuade their colleges and universities to commit to 100 percent renewable energy. ■

CALPIRG Education Fund Public Health Advocate Laura Deehan calls for San Diego Unified School District to adopt a lead remediation standard of 1 ppb at a February press conference in San Diego.



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TOP STORY:

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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 CALPIRG 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,

Emily Rusch
Executive Director
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