Public Health

Hold The Antibiotics, McDonald’s

For years, the meat industry has vastly overused medically important antibiotics to produce more meat more cheaply. But this misuse is breeding “superbugs”—drug-resistant bacteria that can cause infections we can’t treat.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that if we don’t take action soon, we could all live in a post-antibiotic era, where common infections can once again kill. Some experts are even warning that superbugs could kill more people by 2050 than cancer kills today.

Given the lack of progress at the federal level, PennPIRG is seeking to save antibiotics through corporate action. Since restaurant chains are sensitive to consumer demand, and are some of the biggest purchasers of meat, they are a great target for changing agricultural practices.

Industry-Wide Change

Along with our national network, we’ve helped convince McDonald’s, Subway, KFC and other chains to stop serving chicken raised on human antibiotics.

Thanks to your support, these commitments are changing the industry. The most recent FDA data shows that sales of medically important antibiotics for food production fell for the first time since recordkeeping began.

But with 23,000 Americans dying each year from antibiotic-resistant infections, we need more action. So we’re going back and calling on McDonald’s, one of the country’s biggest purchasers of beef and pork, to get our life-saving medicines out of its entire supply chain.

This summer, our national citizen outreach staff are going door to door across the country to raise awareness and mobilize public support for saving our antibiotics. With your generous support, we can continue pushing to keep our life-saving medicines working for when we really need them.

PIRG Consumer Watchdog

Consumers Deserve More After Equifax

When the credit bureau Equifax lost the critical financial data of nearly 148 million Americans last year, it was a startling reminder that we need a lot more control over our personal information.

If you haven’t taken steps to protect yourself, such as placing credit freezes or fraud alerts, you should. But in most states, protecting your credit will require you to pay a fee to ensure all three credit agencies protect your data.

That’s why we’re supporting legislation that would set free freezes for all Americans as the floor of protection. While Congress delays, our national network has been working on free credit freeze bills in several states, including California, Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Oregon and Washington.

With your support, PennPIRG will continue working to ensure you have the tools you need to protect yourself from identity thieves.
News Briefs

Product Safety

Asbestos Shouldn’t Be In Kids’ Makeup

In 2018, we shouldn’t tolerate the sale of products that contain toxics—especially products marketed to children.

Yet research done by PennPIRG Education Fund has revealed lead in toys, chemicals linked to cancer in personal care products, and most recently, asbestos hiding in kids’ shimmery makeup.

Our sister group’s report, “In Your Face,” found that three different products sold by Claire’s contained asbestos, with one containing more than 150,000 fibers of asbestos per gram of product.

We quickly alerted Claire’s to these test results, and asked the company to recall the items and inform customers immediately. We’re also calling on Congress to pass legislation that will protect our kids by requiring appropriate testing and labeling of cosmetics.

Defend Net Neutrality

A Free And Open Internet Is Worth Defending

When the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) decided to repeal net neutrality protections last December, PennPIRG mobilized our members and supporters to defend a free and open internet.

By empowering internet service providers like Comcast, Verizon and AT&T to potentially block or slow down lawful content, or create internet “fast lanes” that would favor certain sites and content over others, the FCC’s decision will suppress consumer choice and fair competition online.

With your support, PennPIRG ran several online campaigns to raise awareness and rally support for net neutrality, focusing on a bill in Congress that would overturn the FCC’s decision. As of this writing, the legislation is under consideration in the Senate and House.

Toxics

No More Bee-Killing Pesticides

Bees pollinate everything from strawberries to broccoli to the alfalfa used to feed dairy cows, and without them, our food supply and environment would be at risk.

Even so, Americans spray about 46 million pounds of neonicotinoid pesticides—one of the worst types of bee-killing pesticides in the world, yet also the most widely used—on our gardens and public spaces every year.

Given the consequences, PennPIRG is calling on our state to ban the sale of bee-killing pesticides. There is already momentum building: Maryland and Connecticut have both taken important action to limit the use of neonics, and the European Union just voted to completely ban them.

We can, and must, do better. Join us in calling on Pennsylvania to take action to protect bees and our food.

CarMax Selling Vehicles With Dangerous Defects

When we drive to work or take our children to school, we shouldn’t have to worry if we’re driving an unsafe car.

Yet a survey of nearly 1,700 vehicles for sale at eight CarMax locations found that more than 1 in 4 vehicles had unreppaired safety recalls.

The report, released by MASSPIRG Education Fund, the Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety Foundation, and the Center for Auto Safety, found that on average, the percentage of vehicles with unrepaired safety recalls CarMax offered for sale has more than doubled, jumping from 12 percent to 27 percent, compared to survey results from 2015.

To protect consumers from dangerous cars like these, U.S. PIRG is suing the Federal Trade Commission to overturn consent orders that allow used car dealers to advertise unsafe vehicles.
Defending The Protections Americans Rely On

After the 2008 economic crisis, millions of Americans lost their jobs, their homes, their retirement savings and more. That's why PennPIRG played a lead role in setting up a consumer protection agency, and helped put in place rules of the road to keep Wall Street in check.

These rules help ensure a fair and competitive marketplace that keeps consumers' best interests in mind. And the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has returned nearly $12 billion to more than 29 million consumers. But now, in the name of regulatory reform, Wall Street, big banks and their allies in Congress are working to strip away these vital consumer protections.

With the support of our members, PennPIRG is able to push back on behalf of the public when consumers are put at risk of wrongdoing.

Opposing Anti-Consumer Attacks In Washington

We're on the ground in Harrisburg and Washington, D.C., keeping an eye on threats to commonsense consumer protections.

We've been successful in stopping legislation that would change the funding and leadership structure of the Consumer Bureau, both of which are key to the agency's past success and continued independence. And we've been hard at work opposing the anti-consumer moves of Mick Mulvaney, who has been limiting the Consumer Bureau's capabilities since the president put him in charge of the agency in November.

Another major threat to consumers in the past few months has been S. 2155, a bank deregulation bill that, despite supporters’ claims, would likely increase mortgage fraud, racial discrimination and risky banking practices. The legislation would also replace stronger state laws against identity theft, potentially deny servicemembers their right to a day in court, and more.

With your support, our advocates have been fiercely opposing this legislation to let Equifax and big banks off the hook, and calling on decision-makers at the state and national levels to instead enact reforms to give consumers more control over our financial lives.

Solutions To Problems We All Face

Whether it’s defending the original mission of the Consumer Bureau or opposing bills that ignore the painful lessons of the 2008 financial crisis, PennPIRG works to unite people from across the political spectrum around commonsense solutions to problems we all face.

But we couldn’t do any of this without the support of members like you. With you by our side, we’ll continue defending consumers and working toward a safer, healthier, more secure future.

Dear PennPIRG member,

By the time you read this letter, our summer door-to-door canvass will be in full swing. In an age of email and social media, this annual effort might seem old-fashioned, but it’s as necessary as ever.

This summer, PennPIRG and our national network are rallying support in 22 states to preserve our life-saving antibiotics. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that at least 23,000 people die every year from antibiotic-resistant bacteria, and experts point to antibiotic overuse on industrial farms as one of the main factors.

Over the past few years, we’ve helped convince restaurants like Subway and KFC to take action to limit this overuse, and it’s beginning to change the industry. Now, we’re calling on McDonald’s to get our life-saving medicines out of its entire meat supply chain, a big commitment that would help protect public health and save lives.

The summer canvass also gives us an opportunity to reach people who might not otherwise hear about this problem and what we can do to solve it. And even for those who might not agree with us, it’s harder to ignore a canvasser at your door than a report from a news source you don’t like.

I’m so grateful for your current support, and I’m excited to see what your support will accomplish this summer and beyond.

Sincerely,

Mike Roles, Director
info@pennpirg.org
Paving The Way For Electric Transportation

Sales of electric vehicles nationwide increased 38 percent in 2016, and another 32 percent in 2017, according to a February report from PennPIRG Education Fund and Frontier Group.

Pennsylvania can accelerate this progress, and also transition to electric school and transit buses, by taking advantage of our portion of the $2.9 billion settlement of Volkswagen’s massive emissions scandal intended for environmental mitigation actions.

Another report released in May by PennPIRG Education Fund and Frontier Group shows the majority of America’s buses remain dirty—but clean, all-electric buses are available, and they’re cheaper for school districts and transit agencies to run in the long term.

A REVOLUTION ON OUR ROADS—The number of electric vehicles on America’s streets is at an all-time high, but are our cities ready to accommodate this rise in clean cars?

An all-electric transportation future offers many benefits, including cleaner air and the opportunity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change. With your support, we can leave federal inaction in the slow lane and put our communities on a fast track to a cleaner, healthier future.