

Concerned Scientists' Weekly News Bulletin [January 19, 2022]



*Our weekly bulletin collects and digests news of the past week.
Contributions welcome.*

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NEWS ITEMS AND ARTICLES

NPR: [A volcano erupts in the Pacific, triggering a tsunami advisory for the West Coast](#)

The eruption of the Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai undersea volcano, the latest in a series of eruptions, has caused massive damage in Tonga, a country in Oceania inhabited by roughly 105,000 people. There have been reports of waves that are up to 2.7 ft high in Tonga and Hawaii. As many parts of Tonga experience blackouts, communication with the island nation has been cut off. However, New Zealand's military is monitoring the situation and remaining on standby to offer assistance.

The Guardian: [Texas scientists' new Covid-19 vaccine is cheaper, easier to make and patent-free](#)

Drs. Peter Hotez and Maria Bottazzi from the Texas Children's Hospital Center for Vaccine Development at Baylor College of Medicine are developing a patent-free COVID-19 vaccine called Corbevax in efforts to make vaccine distribution easier, cheaper, and more accessible. Unlike Pfizer vaccines, Corbevax only requires standard refrigeration, making transit more affordable. Bottazzi's team has already partnered with Biological E, an Indian company, and they will soon have the capability of producing 100m vaccines per month.

Axios: [White House scientific integrity panel draws its own scrutiny](#)

The co-chair of the White House's Scientific Integrity Task Force, noted marine scientist Jane Lubchenco, has a close personal relationship with a collaborator (her brother-in-law), leading to calls for her task force leadership position to be reconsidered to demonstrate accountability.

The Atlantic: [The world is half-prepared for a different energy future](#)

Due to reductions in fossil fuel and oil production and continued demand for it, as well as a mismatch in investments between fossil fuels and clean energy, energy costs will likely increase. Surging energy prices may detract from pro-climate policymaking.

Phys: [New study sheds light on origins of life on Earth](#)

A team including researchers from Rutgers University and the University of Buenos Aires just published a study in *Science Advances* about how life may have emerged from non-living materials. The team found that most currently existing metal-binding proteins share similarities, despite differences in “the type of metal they bind to, the organism they come from, or the functionality assigned to the protein as a whole.” This research may have future applications in synthetic biology and the reconstruction of new proteins.

REGIONAL NEWS

Indiana Environmental Reporter: [Environmental bills to watch in the 2022 legislative session](#)

More than a dozen of the Bills introduced in Indiana’s legislative session have potential impacts on the environment. Among them are proposals for a drainage task force, yearly inspections of confined feeding operations, and a 17-member Climate and Environmental Justice Task Force.

WTHR: [EPA calls out Indiana companies in coal ash crackdown](#)

Coal ash is a toxic byproduct of electricity generation, normally dumped into storage ponds as a means of disposal. Indiana has more than 80 coal ash pits, the highest in the country per capita. The Environmental Protection Agency ruled on Tuesday that companies must stop dumping coal ash into unlined storage ponds. The premature closure of Indiana’s storage ponds may decrease contamination of Indiana waterways.

IndyStar: [Scrub Hub: Why can't we ban plastic bags in Indiana?](#)

In 2016, Indiana legislators passed a bill that prohibited city and county officials across the state from taxing or restricting the use of plastic bags by grocery stores and other retailers. But change may come from within retailers; Walmart launched a “bagless pilot” last year and Kroger has announced that it plans to eliminate all single-use plastic bags by 2025.

Indiana Public Media: [Increased local cases cause strains on testing sites](#)

Monroe County reentered the red advisory on the state COVID-19 dashboard, and Bloomington reported the most city employees to test positive for the virus since the pandemic began. The health department’s gravity testing site on North Curry Pike faced early closures last week due to high test volumes.

OPINION AND ANALYSIS

BBC: [Should bad science be censored on social media?](#)

In a new report, the Royal Society advises against social media companies removing content that is “legal but harmful.” Instead, the report authors believe, social media sites should adjust their algorithms to prevent it going viral--and stop people from making money off false claims.

New York Times: [The C.D.C.'s new challenge? Grappling with imperfect science](#)

Because decisions must be made at a breakneck pace, the agency has issued recommendations based on what once would have been considered insufficient evidence, amid growing public concern about how these guidelines affect the economy and education.

ASBMB Today: [2022 science policy priorities](#)

The Public Affairs Advisory Committee of the ASBMB (American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology) has released their priorities of governmental policies for which they will advocate during 2022. Among these priorities are sustainable funding options for research, solutions to support the training of future generations of scientists, promotion of and support for collaboration with international students and scholars, and increased equity in competition for research grants and funding.

Nature: [What Charles Lieber's conviction means for science](#)

The high-profile US criminal case is already having an impact on the scientific community. It marks the second time an academic researcher has been tried on accusations of hiding ties to China since the US Department of Justice (DOJ) launched its controversial "China Initiative" to root out threats to national security.

Nature: [Weaving Indigenous knowledge into the scientific method](#)

Although research is often dependent upon the assistance and support of Indigenous communities, there remain tensions in the relationships between scientists and Indigenous people. *Nature* interviews three Indigenous researchers and two funders to discuss decolonization efforts and progress in New Zealand and the Americas.

TAKE ACTION AND RESOURCES FOR ACTIVISTS

Confront the Climate Crisis: [Get involved](#)

Confront the Climate Crisis is a grassroots organization of high school students fighting for climate justice in Indiana. They were founded in September of 2020 by West Lafayette Climate. The group has more than 150 student members from communities across Indiana. Get involved by attending a rally, joining the group, or following on social media.

The CSIU Weekly News Bulletin is now available on the web. To view this page online go to <https://csiub.org/weekly-news-bulletins>. To view archives of past bulletins, see <https://csiub.org/bulletin-archives>.

Our CSIU news bulletin is intended to provide a brief update on recent news, editorials, as well as action items related to science integrity and science policy. Note that editorial pieces and action items are assembled from a variety of sources and organizations; they do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policy priorities of Concerned Scientists @ IU. This week's news bulletin was compiled by CSIU member Christoph Irmscher of IU's Department of English and by ASIU members sophomore Rose Schnabel and (new to the team!) freshman Ana Lim. If you'd like to volunteer—or if you have additional links you'd like to share for future bulletins, send them to Christoph at cirmsche@indiana.edu.

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