



## Concerned Scientists' Weekly News Bulletin [July 13, 2020]

### NEWS ITEMS AND ARTICLES

*The Guardian:* [“Compelling” evidence air pollution worsens coronavirus](#)

*New research indicates that a small, single-unit increase in people’s long-term exposure to pollution particles raises infections and admissions by about 10% and deaths by 15%. The study took into account more than 20 other factors, including average population density, age, household size, occupation and obesity.*

*The Guardian:* [Coronavirus pandemic prompts record drop in global emissions, study finds](#)

*Global emissions have dropped by 4.6%, an equivalent of 2.5 gigatons, since the start of the pandemic. However, even if emissions were to continue decreasing 4.6% each year, it is not enough to reach the goal of only 1.5<sup>c</sup> warming by 2050. An analysis from MIT, Northwestern, and Yale determined that pushing back investments in renewables for a year could outweigh the positive effects of emission reductions during this time.*

*New York Times:* [Fracking firms fail, rewarding executives and raising climate fears](#)

*Oil and gas companies in the United States are hurtling toward bankruptcy at a pace not seen in years, driven under by a global price war and a pandemic that has slashed demand. And in the wake of this economic carnage is a potential environmental disaster—unprofitable wells that will be abandoned or left untended, even as they continue leaking planet-warming pollutants, and a costly bill for taxpayers to clean it all up.*

*Nature:* [Removal of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> by rock weathering holds promise for mitigating climate change](#)

*Enhanced rock weathering results in basalt or silicate materials being added to the soil, which react with CO<sub>2</sub> to form carbonates that remain in the soil, drawing 0.5-2 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere annually. The nutrients and increased pH from the rock weathering would likely benefit crop production. Financial incentives in food production, such as increased crop growth, might help gain farmer support in new climate-change mitigation measures.*

*The New York Times:* [Who Gets a Vaccine First? U.S. Considers Race in Coronavirus Plans](#)

*The CDC and a committee comprised of representatives from immunology, infectious disease and other medical specialties, as well as eight federal officials focused on vaccines, are developing a plan for the implementation and distribution of future coronavirus vaccines. Medical and national security officials are likely to receive vaccines first, followed by essential workers, and high-risk populations such as the elderly and those with underlying conditions. There is current debate as to whether Black and Latino communities should also receive priority as they have been disproportionately affected by the virus.*

*The Guardian:* [“It’s all on hold”: How Covid-19 derailed the fight against plastic waste](#)

States have lifted plastic bag bans, with some even banning the use of reusable grocery bags in stores, due to the pandemic. In California, 500 million additional plastic bags have been handed out each month. Increased amounts of take-out containers and disposable masks have contributed to the problem, meanwhile previously proposed legislation aimed at reducing single-use plastics has stalled.

Science: [“Huge hole” in COVID-19 testing data makes it harder to study racial disparities](#)

Lower rates of testing in many low-income and minority neighborhoods, as well as lack of race and ethnicity information for half of reported cases worldwide, impede research into how and why different communities are impacted. A county-by-county analysis performed at the University of Delaware showed that in Northeastern states, “residents’ minority status and language best explained infection rates” whereas “factors related to housing and transportation predicted infections better than ethnic factors” in Gulf Coast states.

The Hill: [Committee votes to block Trump's “secret science” EPA rule](#)

The House Appropriations Committee on Friday voted to block a controversial Trump Administration transparency rule that the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) own independent board of science advisers criticized.

Common Dreams: [Watchdog accuses Trump’s NOAA of choosing extinction for critically threatened right whales by hiding scientific evidence](#)

Reports that appointees modified scientists' warnings "raise troubling questions about whether political appointees at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration violated federal law and NOAA’s own Administrative Order on Scientific Integrity, which mandates that in 'no circumstance may any NOAA official ask or direct Federal scientists or other NOAA employees to suppress or alter scientific findings.'"

American Institute of Physics: [Lawsuits Challenge ICE Demand That Students Attend Class In Person or Leave US](#)

Harvard, MIT, and the State of California have sued the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement over a policy that would force international students to leave the country if they are only taking online classes this upcoming fall. Universities argue that the policy seems to aim to force schools to open and will severely hurt opportunities for the US to compete for international talent. The policy replaced an earlier guidance that allowed students to stay if their institutions switched to remote learning just as many schools were finalizing their plans for the fall.

Nature: [Scientists in China say US government crackdown is harming collaborations](#)

Scientists in China have told Nature that they are reluctant to travel to the United States for conferences or other research activities even when pandemic travel restrictions lift. They fear being caught up in the US government’s crackdown on foreign interference in science and ongoing political tensions between the two nations. The scrutiny has also led some researchers in China to dial back on collaborations with US colleagues and form new partnerships with teams in Europe or Japan.

Science: [“Disturbing and cruel.” Universities blast new visa rule for international students](#)

Students forced to return to more-distant homes may face additional challenges, including the risks of travel during a pandemic, the financial burden of flight tickets, broken apartment leases, and additional visa fees when they return to the United States. Some may also find their future career plans derailed.

The Guardian: [Children who drink water from private wells at higher risk of lead exposure](#)

42.5 million Americans, about 13%, rely on unregulated private wells for drinking water. Children dependent on these wells are 25% more likely to have high lead levels in their blood than those dependent on municipal water services. Private wells are excluded from the Safe Drinking Water Act and rely instead on owners to monitor and maintain their own water

quality. Low-income and minority households face especially high risks as previous zoning practices exclude many from nearby community water services.

Science: [NSF campaign will drill for ice capturing West Antarctica's last collapse](#)

*The National Science Foundation plans to fund a 5-year project that will collect data as evidence for the West Antarctic Ice Sheet collapse suspected to have occurred 125,000 years ago. Global temperatures at the time were 1°C higher than those today, but sea levels were 6-9 meters higher, possibly due to melting in Antarctica.*

The New York Times: [Is this the end of new pipelines?](#)

*The Dakota Access Pipeline, which would transport oil from North Dakota to Illinois, was shut down by a federal judge last week and requires a new environmental review. The same day, the Supreme Court rejected a request from the Trump Administration to allow construction of the Keystone XL pipeline, which planned to carry crude oil from Canada to Nebraska. The Atlantic Coast Pipeline, aimed to transport natural gas across the Appalachians, was also shut down amid environmental lawsuits and delays. Many miles of pipeline are still planned across the US but face increasing backlash and legal obstacles.*

## **REGIONAL NEWS**

Indy Star: [Environmental groups ask DNR to review its policies after alleged racist Lake Monroe assault](#)

*The groups, which include the Hoosier Environmental Council, Friends of Lake Monroe and Sierra Club's Hoosier Chapter, issued a joint statement declaring the altercation a "violent racist incident," and calling on the DNR to ensure that people of color can enjoy the state's natural areas.*

## **OPINION AND ANALYSIS**

Grist.org: [Lessons from a hotter planet: Things escalate quickly](#)

*Interview with Mark Lynas, author of the recently published Our Final Warning: Six Degrees of Climate Emergency, about how much has changed in the last 15 years, how the COVID 19 pandemic resembles climate change, and how he manages to live happily while carrying the knowledge of looming doom.*

Politico: [A casualty of Trump's immigration policy: Millions of trees](#)

*America needs millions of new trees each year for forests damaged by natural catastrophes, thinned by logging and developed to protect watersheds. But this year, many of the temporary seasonal workers who do the planting are being barred from the U.S. by the Trump administration.*

Inside Higher Ed: [The current plight of international students](#)

*International students should not be treated as revenue-generating cash cows. If we want them to survive and return, we must do better and show them that we care about them as valued members of our communities. In the short term, we will be fulfilling our responsibilities as educators. In the long term, we'll be ensuring that America retains its ability to attract the world's best talent and its position as a global leader.*

Civil Notion: [Masking scientific truth: What it means for US climate policy](#)

*Successful responses to existential threats to the economic and physical wellbeing of the nation as great as those posed by pandemics and climate change require national science-based policies based on truth rather than political relativity. Enlightened policies, however, will only come about through enlightened leadership by example.*

Science: [School openings across globe suggest ways to keep coronavirus at bay, despite outbreaks](#)  
*Opening safely, experts agree, isn't just about the adjustments a school makes. It's also about how much virus is circulating in the community, which affects the likelihood that students and staff will bring COVID-19 into their classrooms.*

Financial Times: [Climate change: what Antarctica's "doomsday glacier" means for the planet](#)  
*Only a handful of people had ever set foot on Thwaites Glacier before last year. Now it is the focus of a major research project, led by British and American teams, as scientists race to understand how the glacier—which is the size of Britain and melting very quickly—is changing, and what that means for how much sea levels rise during our lifetimes.*

## **TAKE ACTION**

Change.org: [Allow F-1 and M-1 students with valid visas to stay in the United States](#)  
*International students pay the highest tuition to colleges and universities and shifting to an online-only syllabus does not reduce and shrink the economic burden of the high tuition costs. Forcing international students to pay these high costs while also forcing them to leave the country makes no sense and is unfair on many levels.*

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 ASIU and IU biology major Emma Hand and CSIU member Christoph Irmscher of IU's Department of English. We're looking for volunteers! 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](mailto:cirmsche@indiana.edu).

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