



# PLANETARY HEALTH WEEKLY

BRINGING YOU CURRENT NEWS ON ECOLOGICAL WELLNESS & GLOBAL HEALTH

Volume 4, Number 45

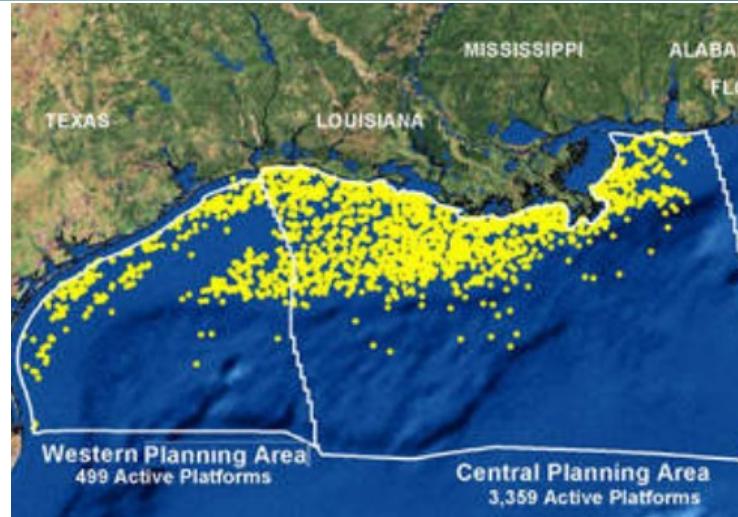
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November 8, 2018

## A 14-YEAR-LONG OIL SPILL IN THE GULF OF MEXICO VERGES ON BECOMING ONE OF THE WORST IN U.S. HISTORY

An oil spill that has been quietly leaking millions of barrels into the Gulf of Mexico has gone unplugged for so long that it now verges on becoming one of the worst offshore disasters in U.S. history. Between 300 and 700 barrels of oil per day have been spewing from a site 12 miles off the Louisiana coast since 2004, when an oil-production platform owned by Taylor Energy sank in Hurricane Ivan. Many of the wells have not been capped, and federal officials estimate that the spill could continue through this century. With no fix in sight, the Taylor offshore spill is threatening to overtake BP's Deepwater Horizon disaster as the largest ever. About 2,000 platforms stand in the waters off Louisiana. Nearly 2,000 others are off the coasts of Texas and Mississippi. On top of that are nearly 50,000 miles of active and inactive pipelines carrying oil and minerals to the shore.

[Read more at The Washington Post.](#)



Credit: Earthly Issues

## ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

U of T Startup Turns Food Waste Into Bio-plastics 2  
NASA Launches Satellite To Track Earth's Ice Melting  
Scientists Are Worried By Loss Of Insects

Farm And Food Policy Innovations for Digital Age 3  
End Policies That Ban Pregnant Girls From School  
Yvonne Sylvain: Women's Health Pioneer In Haiti

Spaceship Earth: A New View of Environmentalism 4  
EPA Dissolves Boards Of Pollution Scientists  
Legal Victory For Indigenous Rights In Ecuador

Quote Of The Week On Climate Change And Events 5

FYI#1: New On Website: Building A Movement For 6  
Health: Learning From The Worldwide Experiences  
Of The People's Health Movement (PHM)

FYI#2: Jamaica Takes Aim At The Trash Crisis 7

FYI#3: Bill Gates-Led \$1B Energy Fund Expands 8  
Portfolio Of Startups Fighting Climate Change

FYI#4: India's e-Rickshaw Revolution 9

FYI#5: Clean Energy Transition Makes Reforms 10  
'Inescapable' For Oil States

FYI#6: Five Ways to Engage Uninterested Students 11

Backpage: Africa's s Tree of Life

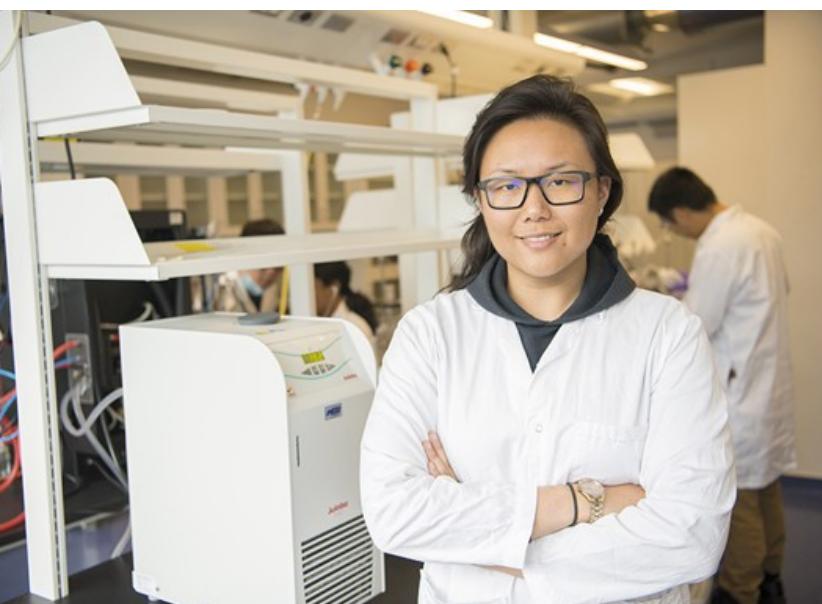
## DESPITE PROGRESS, OVER 200 MILLION WOMEN STILL WAITING FOR MODERN CONTRACEPTION

The international community will be commemorating two milestones in the history of population and development next year: the 50th anniversary of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the 25th anniversary of a Program of Action adopted at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. UNFPA Executive Director Dr Natalia Kanem pointed out that the world has made great progress in recent decades, as reflected in impressive declines in maternal deaths and child marriage rates. Fewer women around the world are dying in pregnancy and childbirth. More women are using modern contraception. More girls are in school. But over 300,000 women die during pregnancy or childbirth every year while tens of thousands of girls continue to be married off every day—in child marriages. And the global epidemic of violence against women and girls, including FGM persists.

[Read more at Inter Press Service News.](#)



Credit: UNFPA



Credit: Don Campbell

## NASA LAUNCHES SATELLITE TO PRECISELY TRACK HOW EARTH'S ICE IS MELTING

The world will soon have a much clearer picture of how quickly humans are melting Earth's ice and expanding the seas, with data collected by a sophisticated satellite launched by NASA. Melting ice in Greenland and Antarctica has increased the global sea level more than a millimeter per year, a third of the overall increase. Sea-level rise is getting faster, and seas could be several feet higher by the end of the century. The IceSat-2 replaces an original satellite that has been out of commission since 2009. Since then, NASA has used a plane to take more rudimentary measurements of ice melt for about a month per year in the Arctic and Antarctic. The new satellite will provide more complete coverage and measure to within a centimeter. NASA has an entire fleet of satellites observing Earth, including for signs of climate change.

[Read more at The Guardian.](#)

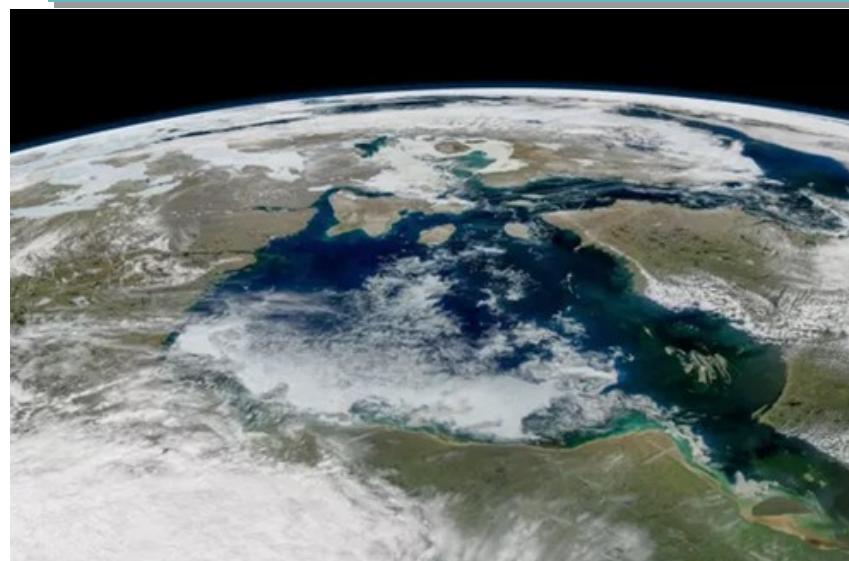


Credit: Wolfgang Kaehler/LightRocket/Getty Images

## UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO STARTUP THAT TURNS FOOD WASTE INTO HIGH-QUALITY BIO-PLASTIC EYES NEXT PHASE OF GROWTH

Luna Yu is passionate about not wasting food, which led her to team up with a talented group of scientists and engineers to form Genecis. The company uses recent advancements in biotechnology, microbial engineering and machine learning to take food destined for the landfill and convert it into PHAs – a high-quality, fully biodegradable form of plastic. She worked at a software company as an undergrad before moving to another startup that converted restaurant food waste into biogas, where she met several talented engineers, learned about the microbiology of converting discarded food into other materials, and discovered a valuable lesson in the economics of recycling food waste. After connecting with a fellow environmental science student in The Hub, University of Toronto Scarborough's entrepreneurial incubator, they started looking into what else could be made from food waste.

[Read more at UofT News.](#)



Credit: Modis/Aqua/Nasa

## WHY SCIENTISTS ARE SO WORRIED BY THE HUGE, SUDDEN LOSS OF INSECTS (AND OTHER ANIMALS)

In Puerto Rico's rainforest, scientists have observed an astounding loss of life at the very base of the food web. It's the insects. As an alarming new study in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* outlines, between 1976 and 2013, the number of invertebrates (like insects, spiders, and centipedes) in the Luquillo rainforest caught in survey nets plummeted by a factor of four or eight. When measured by the number caught in sticky traps, invertebrates declined by a factor of 60. These dramatic drops occurred despite the fact that the forest is a protected wildlife area. The researchers note that this loss of invertebrates — which serve as food for many other forms of life in the ecosystem — has also coincided with losses of birds, lizards, and frogs. The report is just one example of a larger, troubling trend: Insects — including yes, bees — and other critters are rapidly disappearing around the world.

[Read more at Vox.](#)

See Also: 'Hyperalarming' study shows massive insect loss.



Credit: BrightFarms

## FARM AND FOOD POLICY INNOVATIONS FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

We urgently need to rethink public policy interventions to help countries navigate opportunities and challenges linked to digital advances in the food economy. The promise of digital disruption in agriculture is enormous. On the data side, a farmer's feel for how to combine seeds, soil, water and weather can now be complemented by mobile-phone based extension services, remote sensing data and artificial intelligence. On the capital side, the "sharing economy" creates amazing new opportunities for the optimal deployment of capital assets—tractors are agriculture's Ubers and grain elevators are its Airbnbs. Advances in fintech are changing traditional land-based collateralization models and mobile banking is putting access right into farmers' pockets. [Read more at Brookings](#).



Credit: Direct Relied/Flickr



Credit: Don Gilberto, Medium

## YVONNE SYLVAIN: WOMEN'S HEALTH PIONEER IN HAITI

In the mid-20th century, a remarkable woman used her medical prowess and social prestige to address inequalities in Haitian society and raise the profile of public health. Born in Port-au-Prince in 1907, Yvonne Sylvain was the sixth of seven children of the poet, diplomat and lawyer Georges Sylvain and his wife Eugénie. Both parents were part of a progressive intellectual elite that campaigned against the US occupation of Haiti, which lasted from 1915 to 1934. With a staunch feminist for a mother, the four Sylvain sisters all pursued either PhDs or medical training and furthered the cause of women's rights. The eldest, Madeleine, co-founded Haiti's Ligue Féminine d'Action Sociale (LFAS) in 1934. Like her sisters, Yvonne was active in the organisation, and wrote on medical topics for its newspaper, *La Voix des Femmes*.

[Read more at The Lancet](#).



Credit: NASA

## SPACESHIP EARTH: A NEW VIEW OF ENVIRONMENTALISM

Spaceship Earth enters 2018 belching smoke, overheating and burning through fuel at a frightening rate. It's an antiquated metaphor to discuss a planet with 7+ billion people, a global economy, a World Wide Web, climate change, exotic organisms running amok and all sorts of resource shortages and ecological challenges. More and more environmentalists and scientists talk about the planet as a complex system, one that human beings must aggressively monitor, manage and sometimes reengineer. Kind of like a spaceship. This is a sharp departure from traditional "green" philosophy. The more orthodox way of viewing nature is as something that must be protected from human beings — not managed by them. Emma Marris, author of "Rambunctious Garden: Saving Nature in a Post-Wild World" now writes about restoration ecology in "The God Species: Saving the Planet in the Age of Humans." [Read more at The Washington Post.](#)



Credit: bhumann34/Pixabay

## SPOTLIGHT ON POLICY: EPA DISSOLVES BOARDS OF POLLUTION SCIENTISTS

The EPA has dismissed two panels of outside scientists that advised the agency on particulate matter and ground-level ozone, which have been linked to smog and respiratory problems. Under acting administrator Andrew Wheeler, a former coal-industry lobbyist, analyzing those pollutants will be left to the EPA's internal Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee. The CASAC is a seven-member board made up primarily of government officials and the Army Corps of Engineers. Environmental groups were quick to criticize the move to disband the advisory panels. "By removing science and scientists, they are making it easier for the administration to set a weaker standard" Gretchen Goldman, research director of the Union of Concerned Scientists' Center for Science and Democracy told the Washington Post. [Read more at Green Car Reports.](#)



## SPOTLIGHT ON INDIGENOUS WELLNESS: AN UNPRECEDENTED LEGAL VICTORY FOR INDIGENOUS RIGHTS IN ECUADOR FREES UP HUGE SWATH OF AMAZONIAN RAINFOREST FROM GOLD MINING

On October 22nd 2018, the Kofan people of Sinangoe in the Ecuadorian Amazon won a landmark legal battle to protect the headwaters of the Aguarico River, one of Ecuador's largest and most important rivers, and nullify 52 mining concessions that had been granted by the government in violation of the Kofan's right to consent, freeing up more than 32,000 hectares of primary rainforest from the devastating environmental and cultural impact of gold mining. This precedent-setting decision will inspire indigenous nations across the Amazon and land defenders worldwide for years to come. In a historic ruling, the Provincial Court accepted evidence of environmental impacts provided by the community of Sinangoe and the provincial ombudsman, charged the government with not having consulted the Kofan, denounced the mining operations for having violated indigenous rights to water, food and a healthy environment, and cancelled all this mining. [Read more at Amazon Frontlines.](#)

**“Climate change is occurring earlier and more rapidly than expected. Even at the current level of 1C warming, it is painful...There is a growing recognition that 2°C is dangerous.”**

*Johan Rockström, a co-author of the recent Hothouse Earth report, said scientists never previously discussed 1.5°C, which was initially seen as a political concession to small island states. But he said opinion had shifted in the past few years along with growing evidence of climate instability and the approach of tipping points that might push the world off a course that could be controlled by emissions reductions.*

Read more at The Guardian.



Credit: Curtis Christophersen, UNU

## EVENTS TABLE

DATES	CONFERENCE	LOCATION	REGISTER
Nov. 29th	Revisiting Primary Health Care and Alma Ata in the SDG Era	Toronto Canada	<a href="http://www.dlspn.utoronto.ca/event/revisiting-primary-health-care-and-alma-ata-in-the-sdg-era/">http://www.dlspn.utoronto.ca/event/revisiting-primary-health-care-and-alma-ata-in-the-sdg-era/</a>
Nov. 12th-15th	The Fifth International Conference on Family Planning	Kigali Rwanda	<a href="http://2018.fpconference.org/program/scientificprogram/">http://2018.fpconference.org/program/scientificprogram/</a>
Nov. 15th-19th	4th People's Health Assembly	Dhaka Bangladesh	<a href="https://archive.phmovement.org/en/node/10805">https://archive.phmovement.org/en/node/10805</a>
Nov. 19th-21st	Canadian Conference on Global Health	Toronto Canada	<a href="https://archive.phmovement.org/en/node/10805">https://archive.phmovement.org/en/node/10805</a>
Mar. 8th-10th	10th annual CUGH Conference - Translation and Implementation for impact in Global Health	Chicago USA	Panel and Abstract proposal deadline - August 25, 2018
Apr. 30 <sup>th</sup> – May 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Public Health 2019 (CPHA)	Ottawa Canada	<a href="https://www.cpha.ca/public-health-2019-program">https://www.cpha.ca/public-health-2019-program</a>
Mar. 20th-22nd	2019 Climate Leadership Conference and Awards	Baltimore USA	<a href="https://www.climateleadershipconference.org/">https://www.climateleadershipconference.org/</a>





## SPOTLIGHT ON MEDIA: NEW ON WEBSITE: BUILDING A MOVEMENT FOR HEALTH: LEARNING FROM THE WORLDWIDE EXPERIENCES OF THE PEOPLE'S HEALTH MOVEMENT (PHM)



Credit: People's Health Movement

The struggle for health and social justice has a long and proud history that has been driven by diverse social movements involving many individuals and organisations in different contexts. Today, the active role of organised civil society is more necessary than ever. Based on the interactive manual developed by People's Health Movement (PHM) and Viva Salud, there is now a new section of the PHM website dedicated to movement building. In this you can:

- browse through six key practices of movement building: relationships and values, organisation and strategy, visible actions, participation, networking, learning from experience;
- access more than 25 case studies of health activism from all over the world; and
- contribute your own experience by submitting a case study.

This interactive material is intended to be an aid in the struggle for health equity, to support movement-building at the country level, and to contribute to the creation and strengthening of a global movement for health.

[Read more at People's Health Movement.](#)



## JAMAICA TAKES AIM AT THE TRASH CRISIS THAT IS RUINING PARADISE



Credit: Kristal Ambrose

Jamaica, is among at least 20 Caribbean and Latin American nations banning — or in discussions to ban — the importation, manufacture and distribution of single-use plastic bags, straws and Styrofoam. As of Jan. 1, those items were prohibited, and plastic bottles will eventually be collected for reimbursement and recycled. Jamaica is one of several island countries that have reached a tipping point about non-biodegradable waste and the daily threat it poses to paradise. It will not be easy. While the struggle to combat waste is not unique to these islands, their geography makes it harder for them than for large land masses, where landfill sites are plentiful and there is less shoreline, in proportion to the total area, on which garbage can wash up. According to the United Nations, the world consumes each year up to 5 trillion plastic bags made from a petroleum-based product that takes 500 years to degrade. A World Bank report found that close to 420,000 tons of plastic waste entered the Caribbean Sea in 2010, with that amount expected to rise to 790,000 tons by 2025.

[Read more at The Washington Post.](#)



# Breakthrough Energy Ventures



Breakthrough  
Energy VENTURES

→ [www.b-tenergy](http://www.b-tenergy)

Credit: Breakthrough Energy Ventures

Bill Gates aims to invest \$1 billion into Breakthrough Energy Ventures (BEV), radical energy startups capable of drastically cutting global emissions. In addition to Form Energy and Quidnet Energy, which are the first two investments, BEV is funding and publicly acknowledge (some companies in its portfolio prefer not to be named, says Carmichael Roberts, BEV's head of investing, while BEV plans to announce others at a later stage.): QuantumScape, Commonwealth Fusion Systems, Pivot Bio, CarbonCure, Fervo Energy, and Zero Mass Water. Gates has invested in a handful of energy companies before and learned that energy startups are not like software companies. These startups progress slowly and at great expense, earning them the moniker "tough tech" because they work on difficult problems that require fundamental breakthroughs. Investors need to be willing to put forward not just money, but also support for scientists transitioning to becoming entrepreneurs or first-time founders learning to run a company. To be eligible for BEV's money, a startup needs to showcase a scientifically sound technology that has the potential to reduce annual global greenhouse-gas emissions by at least 500 million metric tons. Global emissions currently measure about 40 billion metric tons a year.

Read more at Quartz.

## INDIA'S E-RICKSHAW REVOLUTION LEAVES CHINA IN THE DUST



Credit: Prashanth Vishwanathan

India is home to about 1.5 million battery-powered, three-wheeled rickshaws – a fleet bigger than the total number of electric passenger cars sold in China since 2011. Drivers of the ubiquitous three-wheelers weaving through crowded, smoggy streets discovered that e-rickshaws are quieter, faster, cleaner and cheaper to maintain than a traditional auto rickshaw. They also are less strenuous than cycle rickshaws, which require all-day peddling. So with more rides possible in a day, the e-rickshaws are proving more lucrative. As many as 11,000 new e-rickshaws hit the streets every month, and annual sales are expected to increase about 9 percent by 2021. Three-wheeled vehicles make up a \$1.5 billion market, and manufacturers of electric versions include Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd. and Kinetic Engineering Ltd., along with smaller outfits that assemble parts imported from China. India's dominant ride-hailing startup, Ola, plans to place 10,000 e-ricks in its service by next April. India is the world's fourth-largest auto market, but previous attempts to boost private electric-car ownership flopped. The Ministry of Finance is finalizing a plan to spend about 40 billion rupees (\$600 million) in the next five years to improve the nation's charging infrastructure and subsidize e-buses. Some hindrances include the potential growth of EVs is the lack of charging and battery-swapping stations nationwide and the lack of bank financing for traditional rickshaw drivers, who typically earn low incomes. The potential market for e-rickshaws could be sales of 20 million a year.

Read more at [Bloomberg](#).

## CLEAN ENERGY TRANSITION MAKES REFORMS 'INESCAPABLE' FOR OIL STATES



Credit: Pixabay

In a new report, the International Energy Agency explores what changing dynamics mean for six major oil-producing states and the consequences of a global push to meet climate change goals. Their new report focuses on “producer economies”: large oil and gas producers which rely on hydrocarbon exports for a large portion of their national budgets. Between 40% and 90% of government revenues come from oil and gas income in Iraq, Nigeria, Russia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Venezuela. These earnings make up a similar share of the countries’ total exports. This somewhat precarious position has been exposed by low oil prices since 2014. This has seen many of these countries facing recessions, falling incomes, budgetary deficits and even social unrest. The “shale revolution” and long-term uncertainty over demand for oil and gas are “intensifying pressures for change” in these countries, the report says. The new report presents three different scenarios for how global oil prices and climate policies will play out over the coming decades.

[Read more at Carbon Brief.](#)

## FIVE WAYS TO ENGAGE UNINTERESTED STUDENTS



Credit: Edwin Andrade

Carly Mae shares give ways to engage students, with minimal classroom management issues, and most importantly the students learn. The five ways are as follow:

- Allow the students to learn how they want to learn.
- Show empathy.
- Offer lessons at all different learning levels.
- Include various kinds of media in lessons, and switch up the material every 10-15 minutes
- Being an educator takes effort.

[Read more at Medium.](#)



**Baobab: The African Tree of Life  
Indian Ocean Coast  
Nampula, Mozambique  
November 4, 2018**

Credit: David Zakus

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[planetaryhealthweekly@gmail.com](mailto:planetaryhealthweekly@gmail.com)



Planetary Health Weekly

Publisher and Editor: **Dr. David Zakus, [david.zakus@utoronto.ca](mailto:david.zakus@utoronto.ca)**

Production: **Elisabeth Huang & Eunice Anteh**

Social Media: **Evans Oppong**

