

Earthweek: Diary of a Changing World

Week ending Friday, August 8, 2025

By Steve Newman

Plastic vs. Health

A new review in the medical journal *The Lancet* warns that plastics pose a \$1.5 trillion annual health threat, harming people from infancy to old age.

The report links plastic production and pollution to increased risks of miscarriage, childhood cancers and cardiovascular disease, and says microplastics have been detected in human blood, brain tissue and breast milk.

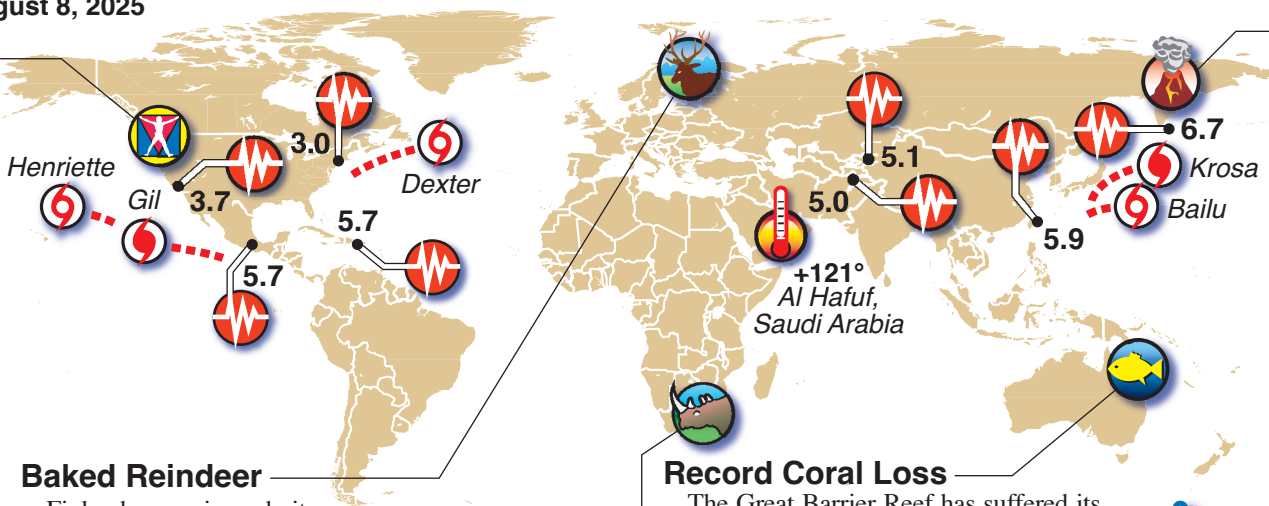
Plastic production has risen more than 200-fold since 1950 and is projected to nearly triple again worldwide by 2060.

Researchers say recycling won't solve the crisis, calling instead for global limits on plastic manufacturing.

Earthquakes

Hundreds of aftershocks hit the area off the Kamchatka Peninsula following the previous week's magnitude 8.8 temblor.

• Earth movements were also felt in Taiwan, Kyrgyzstan, northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan, the Dominican Republic, Mexico's Oaxaca state, the New York City area and interior parts of greater Los Angeles.



Baked Reindeer

Finland experienced its longest heat wave since records began in 1961, with temperatures surpassing 91 degrees Fahrenheit for 22 consecutive days.

Reindeer, which thrive in frigid temperatures, have struggled in the heat, and herders report some deaths due to overheating.

The animals are now abandoning their usual habitats in search of shade and relief from biting insects.

In some cases, reindeer have wandered into people's backyards or joined swimmers at beaches to cool off.

The unusual scenes highlight how Finland's wildlife is being forced to adapt to extreme weather driven by climate change.

Radioactive Rhinos

Scientists in South Africa have launched a groundbreaking initiative to combat rhino poaching by injecting small amounts of radioactive isotopes into the animals' horns.

The isotopes, harmless to the rhinos, can be detected by radiation scanners at airports and borders, potentially alerting authorities to illicit trafficking attempts.

The "Rhisotope Project," led by the University of the Witwatersrand, began with five rhinos and follows a successful pilot program involving 20 animals.

South Africa loses hundreds of rhinos annually to poaching.

Record Coral Loss

The Great Barrier Reef has suffered its largest annual drop in coral cover since records began in the 1980s, according to a new report from the Australian Institute of Marine Science.

A severe mass bleaching event in early 2024, compounded by cyclones and flooding, caused coral cover to fall by 25% in the northern reef and 30% in the southern section.

Scientists warn that repeated bleaching events are occurring too frequently for the reef to recover, with the system becoming increasingly unstable.



Wild reindeer take a dip amid humans in northern Finland to escape the record heat wave baking much of Scandinavia. Photo: Pekka Niinivaara

Eruption Swarm

Seven volcanoes have begun erupting at the same time on Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula, in a "parade" of eruptions not seen in almost 300 years.

Bezmianny, Kambalny, Karymsky, Klyuchevskoy, Krasheninnikov, Mutnovsky and Avachinsky volcanoes began to spew lava and ash following the massive temblor off southern Kamchatka during the previous week.

Six of the eruptions followed the surprise awakening of the Krasheninnikov volcano, which saw lava flow for the first time in nearly 600 years.

Local officials said the last recorded flow there was in 1463.

Tropical Cyclones

Tropical storm development across the Northern Hemisphere increased, with Typhoon Krosa and Tropical Storm Bailu churning the western Pacific.

• Hurricane Gil formed off Mexico, while Tropical Storm Henriette passed northeast of Hawaii.

• Tropical Storm Dexter spun up over the Atlantic.



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