



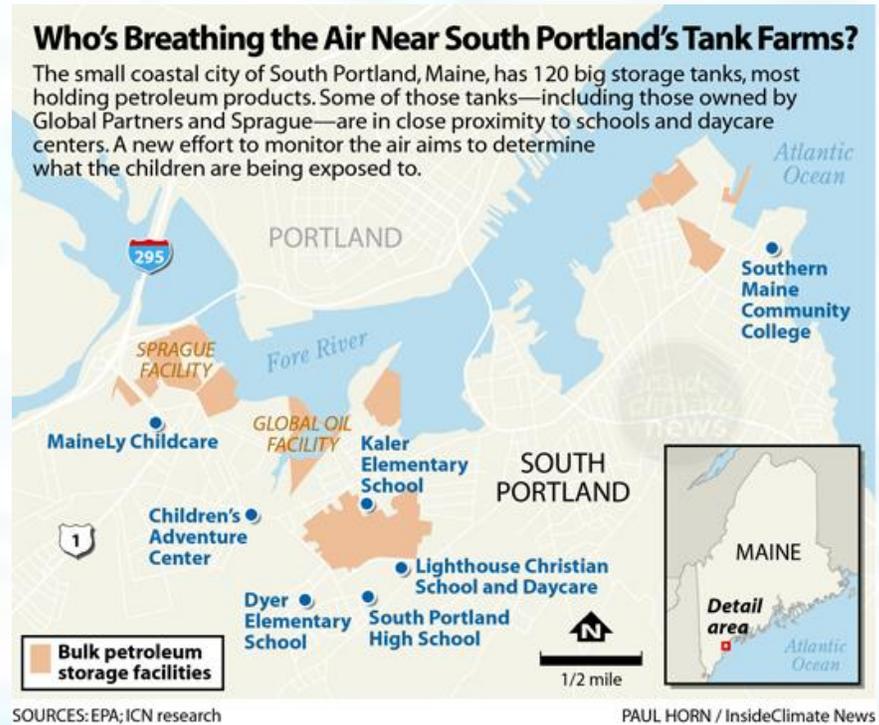
# the weekly anthropocene



dispatches from the wild, weird world of humanity and its biosphere

By Sam Matey, June 5 2019

**South Portland, Maine.** In an absolutely shocking and unacceptable betrayal of the public's trust, it has been revealed that Global Partners, an oil company owning four industrial storage tanks in South Portland, has been in violation of its emissions permit since at least 2013. The tanks are emitting twice the permitted level of volatile organic chemicals (VOCs), a class of compounds that can cause severe health problems ranging from asthma attacks to nerve damage to cancer. Furthermore, the offending tanks are within a few miles of an array of schools and daycare facilities (see map). In an astounding



case of bureaucratic negligence, neither the city of South Portland nor local residents were notified by the EPA of this imminent threat to their well-being until March 2019, when it filed a consent decree negotiated with Global Partners in which they would pay a \$40,000 fine and install equipment to reduce their VOC emissions to acceptable levels. As South Portland, and the Maine DEP scrambled to establish air pollution monitoring to quantify the hitherto unknown threat to their children, a second revelation began to emerge. By June, it was apparent that Sprague Industries, another energy storage company leasing tanks in South Portland, was also emitting unacceptable levels of VOCs, and had spent the previous nine years in clandestine legal arguments with the EPA. Sprague Industries has not paid any fine or planned to take any action whatsoever to reduce their emissions. Unbelievably, it appears not one but two major energy companies have been spouting toxins into South Portland's air for years without anyone outside the companies and the EPA knowing about it. South Portland Mayor Claude Morgan was never contacted by either the EPA or the offending companies prior to March 2019, and learned about this threat to his community when a reporter called him to ask for his viewpoint. He states that the EPA recently called him to apologize, and explained that they had thought they had notified South Portland of the problem via one slide in a PowerPoint presentation at a meeting years ago. On Monday, June 10<sup>th</sup>, South Portland began a program to teach citizens how to take air samples, which will be analyzed in a lab for signs of toxins. This issue is far from resolved. For the full story, please see Inside Climate News' hard-hitting coverage (in the first of a planned series of articles on the issue) at [tinyurl.com/y3qy2r68](http://tinyurl.com/y3qy2r68). Stay tuned.



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**Brazil.** Since he was inaugurated on January 1, 2019, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has been doing his utmost to effectively decriminalize Amazon deforestation, slashing the number of fines imposed and timber seized, sacking 21 out of the 27 state superintendents of IBAMA, the Brazilian environment agency, and moving responsibility from demarcating indigenous peoples' lands (vital sites for ecological and cultural conservation) from FUNAI, the indigenous rights agency, to the historically anti-indigenous peoples agriculture ministry. Unsurprisingly, deforestation in the Amazon has sped up to the fastest rate in a decade, imperiling an ecosystem that is vital for the biodiversity and climate of the entire world. Now, at long last, signs of resistance to Bolsonaro's extremist, destructive agenda are apparent. On May 28, Brazil's Congress reversed Bolsonaro's giveaway to the agricultural ministry by an overwhelming majority, returning the power of indigenous lands demarcation to FUNAI as well as placing the agency itself back under the authority of the Ministry of Justice. The initiative was led by Federal Deputy (congresswoman, essentially) Joênia Wapichana, the first indigenous woman ever elected to the Brazilian Congress (pictured above, in front of the Congress building). This is a huge victory, and a bold strike against Bolsonaro's attempted regulatory capture of a vital tool to protect indigenous peoples' rights. Furthermore, IBAMA is standing strong against Bolsonaro's attacks and continuing to do its duty in the face of presidential opposition. On June 5<sup>th</sup>, June launched its largest-ever operation to combat illegal logging, sending 165 special agents (backed by soldiers and police) to 7 Brazilian states in the Amazon region, Acre, Amazonas, Maranhão, Mato Grosso, Pará, Rondônia and Roraima (see map). Environmental protection in Brazil may be down, but is definitely not out. Great news! For more, see [tinyurl.com/yynp83uf](http://tinyurl.com/yynp83uf) and [tinyurl.com/y27pn8hn](http://tinyurl.com/y27pn8hn).





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**Indonesia.** In excellent news from one of the world's most environmentally important nations, Indonesian Environment Minister Siti Nurbaya Bakar announced that her country's forest clearing moratorium, which bans the clearing of primary and peat forests for the purposes of logging and palm oil plantations, is set to be made permanent in July. The moratorium was first introduced in 2011 by then-Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, but was widely viewed as ineffective until 2015, when current President Joko Widodo increased government enforcement of forestry laws. While there's still room for improvement (clearing secondary forests and clearing for the purpose of planting food crops are not covered by the moratorium) this is a great step forward to permanently protect Indonesia's carbon-sequestering and species-rich forests. Thanks, Indonesia! For more, see [tinyurl.com/yxo7zuj7](http://tinyurl.com/yxo7zuj7).



**Australia.** Australia is growing rapidly hotter and drier thanks to climate change, and some of its most iconic animals are suffering. The koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) is particularly at risk, as it is highly sensitive to heat stress and normally reliant on eucalyptus leaves for moisture. However, these leaves are becoming more toxic due to higher CO2 levels in the atmosphere. Now, in a charming story of humans helping other species survive the Anthropocene, researchers have found that the provision of artificial drinking stations can help koalas survive droughts and heat waves. Dr. Valentina Mella (pictured, with friend) conducted research in Gunnedah, New South Wales to test if koalas would come to drinking stations. The answer was a resounding yes, with 401 drinking events clocked over 12 months (and, notably, with visits doubling in the summer). "We weren't sure if the water stations could be used to mitigate the impact of extreme weather events," Dr Mella said. "But our results clearly show koalas will regularly use these stations to supplement their water needs." (Pictured, right). These results have already inspired the city council of Campbelltown, South Australia, install drinking water stations for their local koalas. Here's hoping this heartening and humane trend spreads nationwide, and enables koalas to continue to thrive-with a little help from their friends-in the Australia of the Anthropocene! Spectacular news. For more, see [tinyurl.com/y5cgs7jz](http://tinyurl.com/y5cgs7jz) and [tinyurl.com/y4x2ewg5](http://tinyurl.com/y4x2ewg5).

