



NGO SUSTAINABILITY

GLOBAL WARNING +1.2°C

LATEST NEWS IN SUSTAINABILITY

NO. 148 | February 2024

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE LIVING AND RENEWABLE ENERGY FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR PLANET

ngosustainability@gmail.com | unngosustainability.org

Consultative Status, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Observer Status, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Your comments are always welcome.

Please feel free to reproduce and share with your colleagues.

- NGO Sustainability team

“Believe in the power of your own voice. The more noise you make, the more accountability you demand from your leaders, the more our world will change for the better.” – Al Gore, Former US Vice President

Virginijus Sinkevičius

Virginijus Sinkevičius is the European Union's top environmental official as the European Commission's current Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries. He is the youngest European Commissioner in history. In this role, Sinkevičius promotes new strategies on biodiversity, air, and water quality as well as international ocean governance. He also leads the Circular Economy Action Plan and the Common Fisheries Policy. At the moment, Commissioner Sinkevičius is undertaking the new international instrument on plastic pollution negotiations. His major achievements are the adoption in 2020 of an EU Chemicals Strategy towards a toxic-free environment, the proposal for a new Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the agreement reached in 2023 to implement an EU Nature restoration Law which sets a target for the EU to restore at least 20% of its land and sea areas by 2030. He began his career in



Virginijus Sinkevičius speaking on European Green New Deal. Brussels, Belgium, 2023. Image: Getty Images

politics in 2016 as a Deputy Leader of the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union. That same year he became Chair of the Parliament Economics Committee and Member of the Parliament of Lithuania. He is also known for serving as Lithuania's Minister of Economy and Innovation from 2017 to 2019. In 2019, Sinkevičius was recognized for his commitment to innovation and ecosystem development, receiving the 2018 Partnership Leader award from Lithuanian Business Confederation.

Metallic Reefs

By Sam Illingworth ¹

Swaying steadily in
kaleidoscopic fields,
spectral fans reflect
the turquoise light;
their mottled aura
straining spectra as
warming oceans
bleach branches and
lighten latticework.

Parasitic hues scar the surface,
lacerating living skeletons
with vibrant, polished purples;
their corrupting shadows
smeared across the ferns,
as copper-coloured paint
leaches from beneath a bow.

Artificial colours
permeate the seascape,
their irregular vitality
piercing faded defences;
saturating oceans,
that rise without restraint.

¹Sam Illingworth. "Metallic Reefs", 2019. <https://thepoetryofscience.scienceblog.com/1028/metallic-reefs/>.

“EU Regulators Propose New Social, Climate Targets Disclosures for Financial Products”

By: Mark Segal, *ESG Today*



Photo: Getty Images

The European Supervisory Authorities (ESAs) have released their Final Report on amending the draft Regulatory Technical Standards (RTS) for the Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation (SFDR), proposing mandatory reporting on social factors and disclosure of greenhouse gas emission reduction targets for financial products. These amendments aim to establish rules for financial market participants, expanding indicators for principal adverse impact (PAI) to include social factors such as the gender pay gap. The ESAs have also drafted RTS requiring financial products with emissions reductions objectives to disclose alignment with the 1.5-degree Celsius global warming goal, alongside pre-contractual, periodic, and website disclosure requirements. The European Commission now has three months to decide on endorsing the draft RTS, separate from the ongoing SFDR review announced in September 2023. These revisions seek to provide investors and advisers with more information on sustainability risks, reflecting the EU's commitment to addressing environmental and social challenges.

[Full Article](#)

“Facing Failure, Vote On EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Law Delayed”

By: Jon McGowan, *Forbes*



Photo: Getty Images

The final draft of the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, or CS3D, that was released on January 30th has faced unprecedented obstacles in the European Councils vote to approve the directive. Though initially it was believed it would be easily passed, it is now delayed due to Germany's indication they will abstain from the vote. There are concerns that the directive will over regulate in the area of European Corporate Sustainability, putting increased pressure on small to medium sized businesses. Since the CS3D has been finalized by the European Parliament, Commission, and Council, there is no ability to amend the proposal. It is now time for the European Council to vote yes or no to see if it becomes law or goes back to the drawing board.

[Full Article](#)

“University of Kentucky scientists develop eco-friendly magnet to battle microplastics”

By: Jordan Strickler, *UKNOW*



Photo: Getty Images

Natural Deep Eutectic Solvents (NADES), created by University of Kentucky researchers, is a new solution in the battle of microplastics in the ocean. NADES is an environmentally friendly ‘magnet’ that attracts and holds on to small plastic particles through the formation of chemical bonds, offering an innovative way to remove them from our waters. This is significant considering the size of microplastics makes it notoriously difficult to remove them using conventional methods. Computer simulations identified solvents that are efficient in extracting different plastic types. This research holds the promise of revolutionizing efforts against plastic pollution by offering a potentially effective and sustainable method for removing microplastics from aquatic ecosystems, thereby contributing to the preservation of marine biodiversity and the reduction of plastic pollution's ecological and health impacts.

[Full Article](#)

“Palm Oil Supplier to Kellogg’s, Colgate, Nestle linked to Peru deforestation”

By: *ESG News*



Photo: Getty Images

A report by the US and UK based Environment Investigation Agency (EIA) reveals that palm oil and cocoa companies, with government complicity, are driving deforestation in the Peruvian Amazon. The palm oil produced has entered the supply chains of multinational firms and is traded to companies producing goods for the EU market. Despite the new European Union Deforestation Regulation, Peru's Congress approved legislation legalizing much of the unlawful deforestation. This move violates the US-Peru Trade Agreement and allows continued trade of unsustainable palm oil and cocoa. The EIA calls for international cooperation to convince the Peruvian government to repeal the forest law modification and increase transparency and accountability.

[Full Article](#)

“Deutsche Bank Backs €4.4 Billion Gigafactory Expansion to Power Europe’s EV Revolution”

By: *ESG News*



Photo: Getty Images

Deutsche Bank announced it will help finance Northvolt's major electric vehicle battery factory expansion through a €4 billion sustainability-linked loan, Europe's largest ever. The financing deal bets big on ramping up regional EV battery production to accelerate electric mobility uptake meeting rising climate targets. Northvolt's new 54 gigawatt hour plant in northern Sweden will nearly double existing capacity, manufacturing advanced lithium-ion batteries exclusively for European automakers. With electric models expected to dominate sales through 2030, establishing robust local battery supply chains reduces import reliance critical to long-term transportation emissions cuts. Deutsche Bank's Mars sustainability-linked loan facility ties borrowing rates to Northvolt meeting ambitious lifecycle emissions levels upholding high ESG standards amidst scaled growth. The partnership encourages Europe's public-private collaborations to rapidly build clean energy independence and zero-emission manufacturing prowess.

[Full Article](#)

“Google Joins Mission to Map Methane From Space”

By: Zoe Kleinman, *BBC*

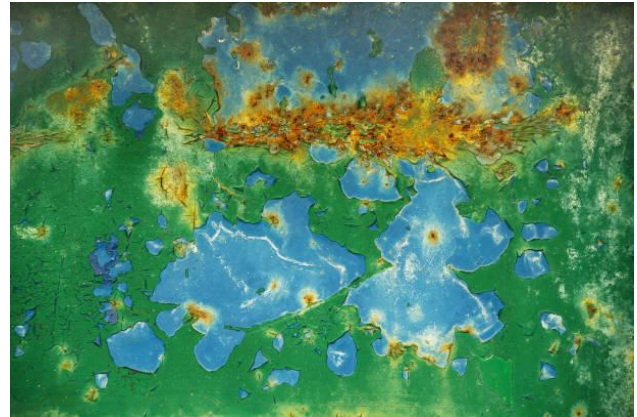


Photo: Getty Images

A Methane-tracking satellite is set to be launched into space in March later this year. Methane is one of the biggest greenhouse gas actors in climate change, possessing over 25 times the warming potential of carbon dioxide over a 100-year period. The satellite is set to track Methane emissions at oil and natural gas plants to get a better idea of their emissions. This initiative aims to address a significant gap in current environmental monitoring efforts, where methane, despite its potent impact on the climate, has been less monitored than carbon dioxide. The satellite is a collaboration between Google and the Environmental Defense Fund. Their goal is to make information more readily available and to use artificial intelligence to create a map that could identify methane leaks. This new technology will go a long way to further understand the effects of methane emissions and the major culprits.

[Full Article](#)

“Biden Administration Toughens Limits on Deadly Air Pollution”

By: Lisa Friedman, *New York Times*



Photo: Getty Images

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has proposed new rules to reduce soot pollution from power plants and vehicles by targeting fine particulate matter (PM 2.5), which poses significant health risks. These rules include stricter emissions standards for new passenger vehicles, requiring an 80% reduction in particulates starting in 2027, potentially through the use of filters or a shift to electric vehicles. This initiative, aimed at preventing over 2,000 premature deaths annually, responds to recent findings on the severe health impacts of PM 2.5 at lower concentrations and addresses the disproportionate exposure of vulnerable minority communities. While health groups support the stronger standards, industry critics warn of higher utility and vehicle costs. The EPA is opening a 60-day public comment period, with plans to finalize the new emissions standards by early 2025. The goal is to balance future health benefits against immediate economic impacts.

[Full Article](#)

“California’s war on plastic bag use seems to have backfired. Lawmakers are trying again”

By: Susanne Rust, *Los Angeles Times*



Photo: Getty Images

After California’s plastic bag ban started a decade ago, activists have begun to notice a trend emerge - plastic bag waste is significantly increasing. A section of the law still allows grocery stores to provide thicker and heavier plastic bags to customers. Companies invented these thicker bags that meet the definition of reusable but were clearly not being reused and do not look reusable, which is opposite of the law’s intent. In efforts to close this loophole, California legislators proposed a solution called Extended Producer Responsibility, which will be more effective in reducing the amount of single use plastics and increasing the amount of recycling. The issue of plastic pollution is gaining more attention in recent times, making effective solutions incredibly important.

[Full Article](#)

*Book Report: Ecolabels,
Innovation and Green Market
Transformation: Learning to
LEED*

By: Daniel C. Matisoff and Douglas S.
Noonan

Ecolabels, Innovation and Green Market Transformation explores the increase in ecolabels and green certification programs over the past few decades. These programs, led by LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) for green buildings, aim to drive sustainability through market forces rather than just regulation. The authors analyze how ecolabels create incentives for companies to invest in environmental innovation and transform their practices to adhere to ever-evolving green standards.

Through detailed case studies, especially of LEED in the building industry, the authors argue that properly designed ecolabels can encourage competition based on environmental performance. As front runners work toward certifications to better their reputation, they must incorporate aspects of sustainability across their product cycles. In turn, this triggers wider market changes as others play catch up to avoid losing business. However, the authors also caution that no single model can be applied across sectors. Drawing on expert interviews, they highlight the need to balance flexibility with rigor so standards drive meaningful progress while encouraging widespread adoption.

A key theme in the book is that true

market transformation requires engaging stakeholders across entire supply chains, not just individual firms. From raw material suppliers to consumers, coordination is key to align sustainability efforts. Governments and policies also play a crucial role in reinforcing ecolabel programs through funding incentives or regulations.

While ecolabels clearly push important sustainability gains, Matisoff and Noonan argue progress measurement remains an enormous, under-appreciated challenge. Data limitations, attribution questions and rapidly shifting baselines harm program improvement. Better informed evaluation and monitoring mechanisms are critical to support the continual improvement of standards over time. This calls for collective leadership and continual learning across policy makers, producers, and consumers.

Op Ed: Moving Toward Energy Justice in Puerto Rico

September 18, 2022, Puerto Rico was hit by Hurricane Fiona. Nearly the entire island lost energy, leaving 1.5 million residents in the dark and over \$2 billion in damages. Over two weeks later, [100,000 were still without power](#). Fiona hit around the five-year anniversary of Hurricane Maria, a disaster which caused nearly 3,000 deaths and, in some areas, an eleven-month long blackout, [the longest blackout in US history](#). For the residents of Puerto Rico, catastrophic power outages have become far too normal.

These outages are no coincidence, rather the outcome of archaic energy infrastructure and a poorly managed system. Currently, the island runs on a highly centralized grid with one major power line. If this line is damaged, the entire island's grid falls apart. Failures that could be solved through the *implementation of decentralized renewable energy*.

Power outages, especially ones which remain unfixed for long periods of time, threaten the health, safety, and well-being of the entire island. Not only are businesses and economies interrupted, critical energy to hospitals, homes, and sanitary infrastructure become less stable. Refrigerating critical medications like insulin, maintaining life supporting care, and simply accessing safe and drinkable water becomes a challenge.

After Hurricane Maria destroyed the island's electrical network in 2017, the US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) [allocated roughly \\$10 billion](#) towards rebuilding the obsolete power grid on the island, setting a goal of total modernization. This money is now managed by [LUMA](#), a private Canadian and mainland US based company who has been tasked with managing Puerto Rico's energy. Since signing their 15-year contract, LUMA has been channeling the FEMA funds toward restoring the expensive, centralized, fossil fuel powered grid. However, this has been met with opposition. Even before Hurricane Fiona, [local groups gathered in the capitol of San Juan](#) to protest against LUMA due to their rising energy costs and random power outages. Additionally, New York attorney general, Letitia James, has been [calling for a federal investigation](#) of LUMA's money allocation for system emergencies.

[The island's energy system](#) runs nearly completely on imported fossil fuels, and the increasing costs of energy are creating an economic burden on residents. Systems which have been perpetuated by LUMA. The irony is, Puerto Rico sees direct sun almost every day of the year, making solar energy one of cheapest, yet unharnessed commodities available. The demand for solar energy in Puerto Rico is quite clear, with over [2,800 new solar projects each month](#), and the [9th highest rate](#) of municipal solar panel installation in the US. Additionally, Puerto Ricans have voted for a [public energy policy](#) with the goal of becoming 40% renewable by 2025, and 100% renewable by 2050. Under current LUMA projects, the island's energy remains only 3% renewable. Reforming the system towards solar utilization would not only be cheaper in the long run, but also align with the sustainable energy goals set by the communities.

Reallocating a portion of the FEMA funds toward solar installations could begin to create community centered decentralized solar grids. This would decrease reliance on the archaic grid which continues to fail communities while also working toward energy independence and justice.

Adjuntas, a small mountain town in the center of the island, is an example of how energy independence can benefit the island. Since 1999, the community has been [operating on a solar energy microgrid](#), independent from the rest of the island's fragile grid. This microgrid continues to sustain the community at a much lower cost than the fossil fuel powered centralized grid. Additionally, when a disaster like Hurricane Fiona strikes, the lights stay on.

Some may argue against decentralized renewable energy on the basis of affordability. The average annual household income in Puerto Rico is just over \$21,000, and the cost to install solar panels to a home's roof is roughly \$10,000, making upfront investments vastly inaccessible to many. However, Queremos Sol, a Puerto Rican energy coalition, has [proposed plans](#) to address this financing gap. The local nonprofit argues for allocation of FEMA funds toward local governments for energy projects. Queremos Sol is advocating for the communities in Puerto Rico to have a voice in their energy future. Rather than leaving it in the hands of private entities like LUMA, they are working toward creating a platform that empowers communities to have a say in the development of reliable and affordable energy solutions.

Energy justice cannot begin until the communities who face the burden of inaction begin to have a voice in their fate. Solving the energy crisis in Puerto Rico must start by first addressing the perpetuated systems of colonial rule in Puerto Rico. The privatization of energy and lack of receptive action from LUMA are a manifestation of the lack of care and disinvestment in the greater system. Allowing Puerto Ricans to determine how the Puerto Rican energy system is built, funded, and managed, is the first step in creating a justice-oriented energy future which uplifts the needs and wants of the people it services.

Producer: Roma Stibravy, President

Editors: Catie Eiref - Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health
Adrianna Mannino - Stony Brook University School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences

Contributors: NGO Sustainability Interns

BECOME A MEMBER OF NGO SUSTAINABILITY!
SEE CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

unngosustainability.org