

The Biggest Green News Stories of 2019

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Most people will remember 2019 as a year dominated by politics. While the U.S. embarked on the third [presidential impeachment](#) in its history, other countries and regions — from Hong Kong to Lebanon to Chile — have [experienced civil unrest](#) in response to growing authoritarianism and inequality.

Although politics dominated the headlines, it wasn't the only major news in 2019. Atmospheric carbon dioxide levels hit [415 ppm](#) this year, the highest level the Earth has seen in 3 million years. These major green news stories show that at least some of us were paying attention in 2019.

American Eco-Embarrassment

Unfortunately, the U.S. government was not among those working to solve the climate crisis. We [reported in 2018](#) that businesses, universities, and nonprofits were surpassing the U.S. government as environmental leaders. This year, that trend has only continued, with the president doubling down on threats to leave the Paris Agreement, sending [official notification](#) to the U.N. of U.S. plans to abandon the agreement it once led in forming.

Mainstream EV Production

Last year, we noted that 2018 was a [pivotal year](#) in the growth of electric vehicle production, and 2019 seems to have borne that out by bringing electric vehicles into the mainstream. Tesla was the first manufacturer to ignore eco-chic and design mainstream-cool electric cars.

While the Tesla [Cybertruck](#) may have moved beyond cool and into avant-garde, other manufacturers are picking up the slack. Ford has presented an [electric Mustang](#) — complete with “manual” transmission and acceleration worthy of its muscle car legacy. [Other manufacturers](#) have announced EVs in the pipeline including sports cars, SUVs, and hatchbacks.

Plant-Based Meat

In the past couple of years, respected journals like [Nature](#) and [The Lancet](#) have come out with claims that a mostly vegetarian diet is required to sustain the world's population long-term — even as charcuterie continued to top [food trends](#).

Fake meats were invented in [medieval China](#). In the West, Kellogg pioneered fake meat with [Protose](#) — a canned nut and gluten product that appealed only to idealogues. Veggie burgers were invented in the 1970s and '80s to provide a satisfying burger for vegetarians. But the [Impossible Burger](#) became the first microbe-generated, heme-containing [meat replacement](#).

Using more traditional methods, [Beyond Burgers](#) has released more meat-like veggie

proteins, and in the U.K., KFC introduced [quorn](#)-based [Imposter](#) chicken. Predictions that the beef and dairy industries are on the [verge of collapse](#) may be overblown. But 2019 may be remembered as the year that fake meat finally went mainstream.

Curbside Chaos

Last year, China essentially [banned](#) imports of foreign commingled recyclables, throwing the U.S. recycling system into crisis. [In response](#), cities around the country found themselves stockpiling recyclables, raising rates, and sometimes, abandoning their curbside recycling programs altogether.

China is now looking at blocking most [fiber imports](#) as well. While the future of curbside recycling is still uncertain, in 2019, the U.S. recycling industry began to adapt by building long-term [domestic processing solutions](#) and individual inventors are developing new recycling technologies like the [Styro-Constrictor](#).

Alternative approaches to the “single-stream” model of waste collection are beginning to test people’s interest, too. We explored the new business models in recycling with companies like [Loop](#) and [Ridwell](#) this year.

Youth Activism

Perhaps the biggest green news story of 2019 is that this year, Generation Z found its voice. Named for the last letter in the alphabet, many in this generation feel like they are the last generation, thanks to the effects of climate change. At an age when their parents’ greatest ambition was learning to drive, today’s teens are building coalitions and leading the charge for a greener world.

The face of today’s youth movement is undoubtedly Swedish teen Greta Thunberg, who first made headlines in fall of 2018 when she began protesting outside the Swedish parliament. But her singular approach caught on, and 2019 saw youth-led organizations like [Fridays for Future](#) and [Zero Hour](#) organizing [international climate strikes](#). Thunberg was named [Time’s Person of the Year](#) this week.

Young people are taking their arguments from the streets to the courts, too. In [Juliana vs. United States](#), 21 American youth are suing the government. Their claim is that the government has failed to protect essential public trust resources and violated their constitutional rights to life, liberty, and property through policies that accelerate climate change. A [federal appeals court](#) heard the case in June.

Sixteen youth, some as young as 8, have officially submitted a landmark complaint to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. They claim that UN member states’ failure to tackle the climate crisis constitutes a violation of child rights. And they are asking the Committee to order member governments to protect children from the devastating impacts of climate change.

Let’s hope that their success is the biggest green news story of 2020.

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