

# SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

## EVENTS

### US finds BSE case

The United States has reported its fourth-ever case of a cow with 'mad cow disease' (bovine spongiform encephalopathy or BSE). On 24 April, the US Department of Agriculture confirmed that routine surveillance revealed the disease in a recently deceased dairy cow in central California. The infected animal carried a rare 'L-type' strain of the disease not detected before in the United States, but it never posed a threat to the human food supply, the agency said. The country's last reported BSE case was in 2006. See [go.nature.com/ntao9c](http://go.nature.com/ntao9c) for more.

## BUSINESS

### Cellulosic-fuel fail

Iogen, one of the world's leading producers of cellulosic fuels (made from straw and other plant waste), has scrapped plans to build a commercial-scale plant in southern Manitoba, Canada. The firm, which is based in Ottawa, had planned to build the plant in partnership with its joint owner, the oil giant Royal Dutch Shell. The 30 April announcement did not explain why the project was scrapped, but a municipal official in Manitoba has said that Shell told him the costs were too high.

## POLICY

### Low-carbon Japan?

Japan's government has approved a revised environmental plan that includes the eyebrow-raising target of cutting greenhouse-gas emissions by 80% by 2050 (compared with 1990 levels). The ambitious goal has been mentioned before, but got its first formal acknowledgement in the plan passed on 27 April.



YOMIURI SHIMBUN/AP

## Drilling into Japan's quake zone

A research expedition has drilled more than 7.7 kilometres below the sea surface to reach the fault that caused last year's devastating earthquake and tsunami off the coast of Japan's Tohoku region. The drilling ship *Chikyu* (pictured) will take temperature measurements near the earthquake's epicentre to measure the heat it generated (see *Nature* 479, 16; 2011).

On 27 April, Japan's Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology confirmed that the drill had passed through 6.9 km of water and bored another 860 metres into Earth's crust. This is a record for research drilling in such deep water, surpassing the previous maximum of 7.05 km set by the US vessel *Glomar Challenge* in the Mariana Trench in 1978.

It seems to ignore the effects of the Fukushima disaster, which shuttered the bulk of the country's low-carbon energy supply — its nuclear reactors. Politicians hope to agree on the country's future energy mix by June. See [go.nature.com/z8p7sh](http://go.nature.com/z8p7sh) for more.

### US-China links

US congressman Frank Wolf (Republican, Virginia), who last October tried to ban cooperation between Chinese scientists and the US White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), has accepted a compromise that resolves the issue. Under a bill passed by the House appropriations committee on 26 April, OSTP representatives must notify Congress 30 days before meeting with

Chinese officials, and will not meet known human-rights violators. In return, the agency will receive its requested 2013 budget, an increase from previous cuts instigated by Wolf. OSTP director John Holdren is in Beijing this week for annual strategy talks between the two countries.

### Slow down, world

In a policy report on the links between population growth, consumption and human and environmental well-being, the Royal Society in London on 26 April stressed the need for more education and voluntary family planning to stabilize the world's population. The report, *People and the Planet*, says that rich economies need to scale back unsustainable material consumption and

pollution; at the same time, it called for more work to cut extreme poverty.

### Forest-loss fear

Legislation that would relax forest protections in the Brazilian Amazon passed Brazil's lower house of Congress on 25 April, after two years of political wrangling. Environmentalists fear that it will lead to increased deforestation in the Amazon. Eyes are now on the country's president, Dilma Rousseff, to see whether she will use a veto power allowing her to strike sections from the law. See page 19 for more.

### US bioeconomy

US President Barack Obama's administration on 26 April released the *National*

**Bioeconomy Blueprint**, a report outlining how government agencies will boost economic activity based on the biosciences. The document focuses on efforts such as investing in research, translating basic discoveries to industry and reforming regulation. Most of the *Blueprint* simply lists existing initiatives — but the biotechnology industry saw the publication as an encouraging step. See [go.nature.com/gziuke](http://go.nature.com/gziuke) for more.

## Science policy gain

The Union of Concerned Scientists, an advocacy group headquartered in Cambridge, Massachusetts, said on 30 April that it had received a US\$1-million donation from physicist and former IBM vice-president Lewis Branscomb to set up a Centre for Science and Democracy. The centre, to be launched on 17 May, aims to ensure that US policy is based on sound scientific evidence, and to prevent political interference in federal science. See [go.nature.com/njrahd](http://go.nature.com/njrahd) for more.

## Flu work published

The Dutch government is allowing publication of a study that created versions of the H5N1 avian influenza virus capable of spreading between mammals. It granted an export control licence for the work



on 27 April, after the research team's leader, Ron Fouchier at the Erasmus Medical Center in Rotterdam, applied for the licence 'under protest'. Fouchier (**pictured**) had earlier argued that his work should be exempt from export controls, and had said he planned to submit his manuscript without a licence. The study will be published in *Science*; a parallel US-led study is published this week in *Nature* (see pages 5, 7 and 13 for more).

### RESEARCH

## Click for updates

A service that aims to make updates to the research record more clearly visible launched on 27 April. Each year, some 100,000 papers are updated with corrections, retractions or other revisions, but readers may miss these changes. In the 'CrossMark' system, documents have a clickable logo that alerts readers to changes — and that publishers could also use to record other

content, such as a paper's peer-review process and funding sources. CrossMark is optional, but its creator, CrossRef (a non-profit collaborative agency formed by publishers), hopes that it will be widely adopted. See [go.nature.com/jkldkb](http://go.nature.com/jkldkb) for more.

## Drug oversight

A report by the US Institute of Medicine has criticized how the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) manages marketed drugs. The institute told the FDA to produce a user-friendly, publicly available risk-assessment plan for every drug it approves, and to update it throughout the drug's lifetime with details of regulatory actions and safety questions. *Ethical and Scientific Issues in Studying the Safety of Approved Drugs*, published on 1 May, was spurred by revelations in 2007 that the diabetes drug Avandia (rosiglitazone) presented serious heart-attack risks.

### PEOPLE

## Urban science

Physicist Steven Koonin, the former undersecretary for science at the US Department of Energy, will head up an urban science centre in Brooklyn, New York. The Center for Urban Science and Progress, announced on 23 April, is one of three

## COMING UP

### 5 MAY

Japan will shut down its final operating nuclear reactor, at the Tomari power plant on the island of Hokkaido. No reactors taken offline since the Fukushima nuclear accident last year have been restarted.

### 7 MAY

Space-flight firm SpaceX of Hawthorne, California, is scheduled to launch its Dragon capsule in a mission to carry cargo to the International Space Station — a milestone for private space flight. [go.nature.com/nosop7](http://go.nature.com/nosop7)

research centres that will be built on city-owned land, under a regeneration initiative spearheaded by New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg. See [go.nature.com/ymk5ug](http://go.nature.com/ymk5ug) for more.

## EPA adviser

Glenn Paulson, an expert on environmental public health, will be the next chief science adviser to the US Environment Protection Agency, said Lisa Jackson, the agency's head, on 24 April. Paulson has worked at the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection in Trenton and the Natural Resources Defense Council, based in New York.

### CORRECTION

The story 'US public health' (*Nature* **484**, 146; 2012) incorrectly stated that an Institute of Medicine report urged a doubling of all federal health-care spending. In fact, it urged a doubling of the federal portion of public health spending.

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## TREND WATCH

Vaccination reduced measles deaths worldwide by almost three-quarters over the past decade, from an estimated 535,300 in 2000 to 139,300 in 2010, says a study published on 24 April (E. Simons *et al.* *Lancet* <http://doi.org/hvf>; 2012). In 2008, the World Health Organization set a target of 90% reduction by 2010. But progress slowed because mass-vaccination campaigns were delayed in India (where 47% of all 2010 measles deaths occurred) and there were measles outbreaks in southern Africa.

## MEASLES DOWN BUT NOT OUT

Deaths from measles decreased 74% in the past decade — but outbreaks in India and Africa are slowing progress.

