

# Best of Last Week – Drivers of flash droughts, pulling carbon from the air, how long COVID-19 vaccinations last

November 8 2021, by Bob Yirka

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The Icelandic plant enterprise sucks carbon dioxide from the air using technology that mimics, in accelerated format, a natural process that can take hundreds of thousands of years.

It was a good week for Earth science research as a team at Harvard University found evidence suggesting that [on ancient Earth, it never](#)

[rained but it poured](#) during times when the planet was 20 to 30 degrees Celsius warmer than today. Also, a team with members from several institutions in the U.S. and one in India explored [the global distribution, trends and drivers of flash droughts](#), droughts that arise quickly and often unexpectedly; the team identified multiple global hotspots. And a team with members from the U.K., the Netherlands and Belgium found evidence showing that [global warming has resulted in more frequent and more intense ice melts in Greenland over the past 40 years](#).

In technology news, Swiss start-up Climeworks began testing a new carbon capture plant at the Hellisheidi geothermal power plant in southwest Iceland. Called Orca, it is [the world's largest plant that uses direct air capture technology](#). The carbon is turned to rock for storage. Also, the team at Boston Dynamics showed off its latest improvements to its four-legged robot by having three of them [imitate the Rolling Stones performing "Start Me Up"](#). And a team at Washington State University demonstrated a prototype of [an electric personal flying machine](#)—a vertical takeoff and landing aircraft that they expect to fly at 160 mph for up to 50 miles. Also, a team working at the Hebei University of Technology unveiled [a system to control robotic arms based on augmented reality and a brain-computer interface](#).

In other news, officials at Pfizer claimed that testing showed their [COVID-19 pill cut hospital and death risk by 90%](#). Also, a team of physicists from New York University and the University of Illinois discovered [how particles self-assemble](#).

And finally, a study by a combined team from the Public Health Institute, the Veterans Affairs Medical Center and the University of Texas Health Science Center [compared the decline in effectiveness for Moderna, Pfizer and Janssen vaccines and looked at the possible mortality consequences](#).

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