Over the last several years, it's become fashionable in some circles to suggest that environmental law today reduces to climate change law. I've resisted that framing because I think it's important to remember that "conventional" environmental problems still exist, still matter, and must be addressed by strategies beyond climate mitigation or adaptation. But the fact that climate change isn't the entire universe doesn't mean it isn't relevant to an awful lot of environmental law and policy. Case in point that I hadn't thought about until recently — CERCLA, the superfund toxic clean-up law.

This morning NPR carried this story about Hurricane Sandy's impacts on New York and New Jersey. The Wall Street Journal ran a similar story about a week ago. The gist of both stories is that there is a surprising concentration of superfund sites very close to coast in the northeast, and that flooding can potentially mobilize toxic materials from those sites. It's a reminder that superfund implementation should take climate change into account — cleanup priorities should consider any increased flood risks associated with anticipated sea level rise or precipitation changes; sites facing such risks should be stabilized to the extent practicable; and information about potential contaminants in floodwaters should be made available as quickly as possible after events like Sandy, so that they can be factored into flood response efforts.

No, climate change isn't the whole story, but it's an important aspect of a lot of different environmental policy stories.