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The Web Discloses Inconvenient Climate Truths

By L. GORDON CROVITZ



For anyone who doubts the power of the Internet to shine light on darkness, the news of the month is how digital technology helped uncover a secretive group of scientists who suppressed data, froze others out of the debate, and flouted freedom-of-information laws. Their behavior was brought to light when more than 1,000 emails, and some 3,500 additional files were published online, many of which boasted about how they suppressed hard questions about their data.

The emails, released by an apparent whistle-blower who used the name "FOI," were written by scientists at the Climate Research Unit of the University of East Anglia in England. Its scientists are high-profile campaigners for the theory of global warming.

The findings from East Anglia have been at the core of policy reports by the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The IPCC does not do its own research but compiles information relating to climate change. It has declared the evidence that the globe is warming to be "unequivocal," a claim routinely cited by lawmakers in the U.S. and elsewhere as authoritative.

The IPCC stresses honest science. According to its Web site, its goal is to "assess on a comprehensive, objective, open and transparent basis the scientific, technical and socio-economic information relevant to understanding the scientific basis of risk of human-induced climate change, its potential impacts and options for adaptation and mitigation."

The panel, which shared the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize with Al Gore, now faces the inconvenient truth that it relied on scientists who violated scientific process. In one email, the Climate Research Unit's director, Phil Jones, wrote Michael Mann of Pennsylvania State University, promising to spike studies that cast doubt on the relationship between human activity and global warming. "I can't see either of these papers being in the next IPCC report," he said. He pledged to "keep them out somehow—even if we have to redefine what the peer-review literature is!"

In another email exchange, Mr. Mann wrote to Mr. Jones: "This was the danger of always criticizing the skeptics for not publishing in the 'peer-reviewed literature.' Obviously, they found a solution to that—take over a journal! So what do we do about this? I think we have to stop considering Climate Research' as a legitimate peer-reviewed journal. Perhaps we should encourage our colleagues in the climate research community to no longer submit to, or cite papers in, this journal."

Other emails include one in which Keith Briffa of the Climate Research Unit told Mr. Mann that "I tried hard to balance the needs of the science and the IPCC, which were not always the same," and in which Mr. Jones said he had employed Mr. Mann's "trick" to "hide the decline" in temperatures. A May 2008 email from Mr. Jones with the subject line "IPCC & FOI" asked recipients to "delete any emails you may have had" about data submitted for an IPCC report. The British Freedom of Information Act makes it a crime to delete material subject to an FOI request; such a request had been made earlier that month.

Over the weekend, East Anglia officials disclosed they had disposed years ago of the historic weather data underlying their analysis. This may be one reason they've fought information requests. They say they'll release the data they still have some time next year.

The emails showed how the global-warming group stifled dissent. They controlled the peer-review process, keeping opposing views unpublished, then cited "peer review" as evidence of their "consensus." One of the dissident scientists, Roger Pielke of the University of Colorado, wrote on his blog that the emails show the "collusion to suppress other scientifically supported views of the climate system, and the human role within it, is a systemic problem with the climate assessment process."

These disclosures have led to some soul-searching. "Opaqueness and secrecy are the enemies of science," wrote George Monbiot, a leading British environmentalist. "There is a word for the apparent repeated attempts to prevent disclosure revealed in these emails: unscientific." Demetris Koutsoyiannis, a hydraulic engineer who has written on climate change, wrote that scientists who suppressed others "must have felt that this secrecy

was their best weapon: to censor differing opinions, to develop 'trick' procedures, to 'balance' the needs of the IPCC, and even to 'redefine' peer review."

This unseemly business reveals another flaw. Why are scholars who review papers allowed to remain anonymous? Reforming scientists and lawmakers might put the question more concretely: How many of the anonymous reviewers who spiked skeptical scientific papers over the years are the people who wrote these emails detailing how they abused peer review to block contrary evidence?

Science was one of the first disciplines to insist on transparency in order to foster competition in data and ideas. In the case of global warming, transparency is better late than never, as policy makers now have the chance to review the facts. Facing up to high-profile flaws is hard for any profession, but honest scientists will cheer how in our digital era eventually the truth will out, and will accept that no scientific hypothesis can be viewed as sacred or can be proved in secret.

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