

Media Perpetuates ‘Conspiracy Theory’ Trump Will Delete Climate Change Data

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December 16, 2016

With the media so worried about “fake news” in a “post-truth” world, it is astounding so many news outlets are perpetuating the unsubstantiated claim that the Trump administration might delete taxpayer-owned climate change data from the internet.

There is absolutely no evidence President-elect Donald Trump will wipe such data from the public domain, and speculation to that end is arguably a futile exercise in fear-mongering.

The claim was first made in a Mashable article by an environmental activist who opposes Trump’s energy agenda and quotes Michael Halperin, an activist with the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS). Mashable reported on a questionnaire supposedly sent by Trump’s transition team to the Department of Energy asking for a list of websites maintained by federal laboratories.

Based on that question, Mashable’s Andrew Freedman editorialized that it’s “unclear what that question is for, but it raises the possibility that websites dedicated to climate change, including data sets from Oak Ridge and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories, could be taken offline.”

Halperin warned that anyone “who relies on publicly available federal government research and information should take steps to ensure that they download what they need before the new administration steps in.”

Pressed by Cato Institute meteorologist Ryan Maue, Freedman admitted the claim was based on “inference” and not anything Trump’s transition team had actually said. Trump’s team has since disavowed the questionnaire, saying it was not authorized by them.

But it was too late. Climate scientist and Slate columnist Eric Holthaus started a Google Doc, and asked people to fill it with climate data “you don’t want to see disappear,” after which, media headlines started to appear.

The Washington Post ran the headline “Scientists are frantically copying U.S. climate data, fearing it might vanish under Trump.” The Post even published an op-ed by climate scientist and activist Eric Holthaus on why he’s “trying to preserve federal climate data before Trump takes office.”

MSNBC's Rachel Maddow similarly reported, "Scientists scramble to secure climate data, fearing Trump purge."

NPR sat down with Holthaus in an interview headlined "Scientists Race To Preserve Climate Change Data Before Trump Takes Office."

Even the Golden Gate state is reacting. California Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown said Wednesday that California would "launch its own damn satellites" if Trump tampered with climate data. He made these remarks at a major scientific conference full of scientists and activists worried about Trump's science agenda.

To his credit, Holthaus admitted he didn't think Trump would delete climate data out of malice, but such data would be left behind due to sharp budget cuts.

"People that work there are going to have to make tough choices, and maybe that means not being able to maintain data sets in the same way that they have over the last several years," Holthaus told NPR.

But it's hard to say what Trump will do with scientific agencies, like NASA and NOAA, since he hasn't nominated anyone to lead those agencies.

Climate scientist Judith Curry is one of those not buying Holthaus' alarmism over data deletion.

"Behave like a scientist, and don't build elaborate conspiracy theories based on vague conflicting signals from the Trump administration," she wrote on her blog. "Stop embarrassing yourselves; wait for the evidence."