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Pelt Michaels? Climategate includes swipe at Pat

by Lisa Provence

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Write a letter to the editor



One scientist was so irked by global warming skeptic Pat Michaels that he ill-advisedly jotted an email expressing interest in slugging Michaels.
FILE PHOTO BY JEN FARIELLO

The summit on global warming opened in Copenhagen December 7, but the heat generated by hacked emails that appeared November 20 has refused to cool, even in the face of the salacious [Tiger Woods scandal](#).

Former Virginia state climatologist and global warming skeptic Pat Michaels ("[Hurricane Pat](#)," as we once fondly dubbed him) pops up in an email as someone that a scientist from the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California would like to attack— and not just in the latest issue of a peer-reviewed journal.

"I'm really sorry that you have to go through all this stuff," Benjamin Santer allegedly wrote a colleague. "Next time I see Pat Michaels at a scientific meeting, I'll be tempted to beat the crap out of him. Very tempted."

The electronic missives purloined from the University of East Anglia show researchers talking about fudging data and keeping skeptical views out of scholarly journals. Such inconvenient truths have already resulted in the resignation of the Dr. Phil Jones, head of climate research there, and they have given Michaels, who [sorta got pushed out](#) of Charlottesville for his own contrarian views, a new pulpit.

"This is not a smoking gun; this is a mushroom cloud," Michaels, [now with the Cato Institute](#), tells the [New York Times](#).

"I'd be surprised if his name didn't come up," says Jerry Stenger, director of UVA's climatology office, of his controversial former boss. "It's very common to discuss others' work."

Also common in scientific circles are "fierce disagreement and strong opinion," says Stenger. What's not so common: "not really following scientific method in significant ways."

Science 101 is that research needs to be reproducible, reminds Stenger. "It sounds like there's been some reluctance in some of the folks to make that data available so other researchers can analyze their conclusions," he says. "That's the most bothersome thing."

The hacked emails have "really muddied the water and made a lot of folks wonder how reliable [the data] are," says Stenger.

"That's the most worrisome," says Stenger. "That's not the way science is supposed to work. It's supposed to be transparent so that others can verify the work."

Stenger hesitates to predict the fall-out from [Climategate](#), but he is willing to predict something interesting to Central Virginia: a colder than usual winter with the odds of a white Christmas one in three for the next three years.