

The Washington Post

In the trenches on climate change, hostility among foes

Stolen e-mails reveal venomous feelings toward skeptics

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Electronic files that were stolen from a prominent climate research center and made public last week provide a rare glimpse into the behind-the-scenes battle to shape the public perception of global warming.

While few U.S. politicians bother to question whether humans are changing the world's climate -- nearly three years ago the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded the evidence was unequivocal -- public debate persists. And the newly disclosed private exchanges among climate scientists at Britain's Climate Research Unit of the University of East Anglia reveal an intellectual circle that appears to feel very much under attack, and eager to punish its enemies.

In one e-mail, the center's director, Phil Jones, writes Pennsylvania State University's Michael E. Mann and questions whether the work of academics that question the link between human activities and global warming deserve to make it into the prestigious IPCC report, which represents the global consensus view on climate science.

"I can't see either of these papers being in the next IPCC report," Jones writes. "Kevin and I will keep them out somehow -- even if we have to redefine what the peer-review

literature is!"

In another, Jones and Mann discuss how they can pressure an academic journal not to accept the work of climate skeptics with whom they disagree. "Perhaps we should encourage our colleagues in the climate research community to no longer submit to, or cite papers in, this journal," Mann writes.

"I will be emailing the journal to tell them I'm having nothing more to do with it until they rid themselves of this troublesome editor," Jones replies.

Patrick Michaels, a senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute who comes under fire in the e-mails, said these same academics repeatedly criticized him for not having published more peer-reviewed papers.

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"There's an egregious problem here, their intimidation of journal editors," he said. "They're saying, 'If you print anything by this group, we won't send you any papers.' "

Mann, who directs Penn State's Earth System Science Center, said the e-mails reflected the sort of "vigorous debate" researchers engage in before reaching scientific conclusions. "We shouldn't expect the sort of refined statements that scientists make when they're speaking in public," he said.

Christopher Horner, a senior fellow at the libertarian Competitive Enterprise Institute who has questioned whether climate change is human-caused, blogged that the e-mails have "the makings of a very big" scandal. "Imagine this sort of news coming in the field of AIDS research," he added.

The story of the hacking has ranked among the most popular on Web sites ranging from The Washington Post's to that of London's Daily Telegraph. And it has spurred a flood of e-mails from climate skeptics to U.S. news organizations, some likening the disclosure to the release of the Pentagon Papers during Vietnam.

Kevin Trenberth, who heads the Climate Analysis Section at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colo., and wrote some of the pirated e-mails, said it is the implications rather than the content of climate research that make some people uncomfortable.

"It is incontrovertible" that the world is warming as a result of human actions, Trenberth said. "The question to me is what to do."

"It's certainly a legitimate question," he added. "Unfortunately one of the side effects of this is the messengers get attacked."

In his new book, "Science as a Contact Sport: Inside the Battle to Save the Earth's Climate," Stanford University climate scientist Stephen H. Schneider details the intense debate over warming, arguing that it has helped slow the nation's public policy response.

"I've been here on the ground, in the trenches, for my entire career," writes Schneider, who was copied on one of the controversial e-mails. "I'm still at it, and the battle, while looking more winnable these days, is still not a done deal."

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