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Hacked Emails Show Climate Science Ridden with Rancor

By KEITH JOHNSON

The picture that emerges of prominent climate-change scientists from the more than 3,000 documents and emails accessed by hackers and put on the Internet this week is one of professional backbiting and questionable scientific practices. It could undermine the idea that the science of man-made global warming is entirely settled just weeks before a crucial climate-change summit.

Researchers at the Climatic Research Unit at the University of East Anglia, England, were victims of a cyberattack by hackers sometime Thursday. A collection of emails dating back to the mid-1990s as well as scientific documents were splashed across the Internet. University officials confirmed the hacker attack, but couldn't immediately confirm the authenticity of all the documents posted on the Internet.

The publicly posted material includes years of correspondence among leading climate researchers, most of whom participate in the preparation of climate-change reports for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the authoritative summaries of global climate science that influence policy makers around the world.

The release of the documents comes just weeks before a big climate-change summit in Copenhagen, Denmark, meant to lay the groundwork for a new global treaty to curb greenhouse-gas emissions and fight climate change. Momentum for an agreement has been undermined by the economic slump, which has put environmental issues on the back burner in most countries, and by a 10-year cooling trend in global temperatures that runs contrary to many of the dire predictions in climate models such as the IPCC's.

A partial review of the emails shows that in many cases, climate scientists revealed that their own research wasn't always conclusive. In others, they discussed ways to paper over differences among themselves in order to present a "unified" view on climate change. On at least one occasion, climate scientists were asked to "beef up" conclusions about climate change and extreme weather events because environmental officials in one country were planning a "big public splash."

The release of the documents has given ammunition to many skeptics of man-made global warming, who for years have argued that the scientific "consensus" was less robust than the official IPCC summaries indicated and that climate researchers systematically ostracized other scientists who

presented findings that differed from orthodox views.

Since the hacking, many Web sites catering to climate skeptics have pored over the material and concluded that it shows a concerted effort to distort climate science. Other Web sites catering to climate scientists have dismissed those claims.

The tension between those two camps is apparent in the emails. More recent messages showed climate scientists were increasingly concerned about blog postings and articles on leading skeptical Web sites. Much of the internal discussion over scientific papers centered on how to pre-empt attacks from prominent skeptics, for example.

Fellow scientists who disagreed with orthodox views on climate change were variously referred to as "prats" and "utter prats." In other exchanges, one climate researcher said he was "very tempted" to "beat the crap out of" a prominent, skeptical U.S. climate scientist.

In several of the emails, climate researchers discussed how to arrange for favorable reviewers for papers they planned to publish in scientific journals. At the same time, climate researchers at times appeared to pressure scientific journals not to publish research by other scientists whose findings they disagreed with.

One email from 1999, titled "CENSORED!!!!!" showed one U.S.-based scientist uncomfortable with such tactics. "As for thinking that it is 'Better that nothing appear, than something unacceptable to us' ... as though we are the gatekeepers of all that is acceptable in the world of paleoclimatology seems amazingly arrogant. Science moves forward whether we agree with individual articles or not," the email said.

More recent exchanges centered on requests by independent climate researchers for access to data used by British scientists for some of their papers. The hacked folder is labeled "FOIA," a reference to the Freedom of Information Act requests made by other scientists for access to raw data used to reach conclusions about global temperatures.

Many of the email exchanges discussed ways to decline such requests for information, on the grounds that the data was confidential or was intellectual property. In other email exchanges related to the FOIA requests, some U.K. researchers asked foreign scientists to delete all emails related to their work for the upcoming IPCC summary. In others, they discussed boycotting scientific journals that require them to make their data public.

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