

Topic : *Topical issues*

Theme: Climategate

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Government position: Note that climate scientists at the University of East Anglia have been comprehensively cleared of any wrong doing by four successive independent reviews. These reviews clear the scientists of any malpractice and praise the public service that the scientists conducted. The quality of science conducted in the UK is world class and the Government remains proud to host some of the world's leading climate science institutions.

The release of 5,000 more of the emails hacked in 2009 just ahead of the UN Climate summit (the UNFCCC COP17) in Durban in late 2011 was a poor and discredited attempt to disrupt the Durban meeting.

Allegations of scientific impropriety at the University of East Anglia (UEA) Climatic Research Unit

- In November 2009, a server at UEA's Climatic Research Unit (CRU) was hacked, releasing emails between climate scientists. The emails described the scientists' work using phrases including 'trick' and 'hiding the decline', which was taken to suggest the scientists had manipulated data trends.
- Together with the Met Office, CRU is responsible for producing one of three analyses of near surface temperature that provide core evidence of global warming. NASA and NOAA (the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) provide the others.
- The three teams use different methodologies to combine thousands of raw measurements; the analyses differ in detail but all show significant warming trends (around 0.8°C since 1900). Warming is corroborated by data from instruments on satellites and seen in physical indicators of temperature (e.g. sea level rise). Such temperature analyses do not make any judgements about whether the warming is human-induced or natural; that assessment is provided by other research.
- In the weeks after the emails became public, CRU was heavily criticised, particularly in the English-language press. Public confidence in climate science appeared to drop. A number of independent inquiries were initiated in the UK:
 - The House of Commons **Science and Technology Committee** initiated the first inquiry (reporting March 2010).
 - **The Scientific Appraisal Panel** chaired by Lord Oxburgh examined the conclusions of CRU's key scientific publications (reporting April 2010).
 - The **Independent Climate Change Emails Review** chaired by Muir Russell was conducted at the request of the University, to examine the veracity of all criticisms directed against the University after the hacking incident (reporting in June 2010).
 - The House of Commons **Science and Technology Committee** reconvened to consider the two independent reviews (chaired by Lord Oxburgh and Muir Russell) and reported in January 2011.
 - Further reviews were conducted outside of the UK.

- These reviews all confirm there is no evidence of scientific malpractice at the University, and the evidence of 20th century warming remains strong.
- The Muir Russell review found:
 - That the rigour and honesty of the scientists are not in doubt
 - That there is no evidence of behaviour that might undermine the IPCC assessments
 - That there is no evidence of bias in data selection
 - That there is no evidence of subversion of peer-review
 - That allegations of misusing the IPCC process cannot be upheld.
- The Lord Oxburgh review found “no evidence of deliberate scientific malpractice at CRU” and “that CRU has done a ‘public service of great value’ in its work”.
- The Government responded to the House of Commons inquiry once the Muir Russell and Oxburgh inquiries had reported.
- The Berkeley Earth Surface Temperature Project is an independent re-analysis of temperature records conducted by scientists outside the field of climate change and initiated in response to events at CRU. Its pre-publication results, released in October 2011, very closely match the observed warming trend seen in CRU’s analysis.
- A widespread criticism of CRU was that they had not made raw data available to people externally who may wish to test their analysis – in fact, the Muir Russell review team established that all raw temperature data were accessible ‘within a couple of minutes’ and that CRU’s analyses could be reconstructed very readily. They did so, and found the same warming trend as CRU. The review team note that critics of CRU would have been free to do this – and to propose alternative scientific hypotheses relating to the data – at any point.
- The main criticism of the independent reviews has been that researchers at CRU were insufficiently open and transparent. The Muir Russell report found ‘there has been a consistent pattern of failing to display the proper degree of openness’ from both CRU and the wider University – in particular in relation to Freedom of Information requests.
- Both the Muir Russell review and Oxburgh review note the strong criticism that scientists at CRU faced when conducting their work. The Oxburgh report ‘deplores the tone of’ much of the criticism directed at CRU, noting that much criticism is ‘uncharitable’, ‘selective’ and ‘lacking in awareness of the ongoing and dynamic nature of chronologies, and the difficult circumstances of university research’. The Muir Russell review found ‘much of the challenge of CRU’s work has not always followed the conventional scientific method of checking and seeking to falsify conclusions or offering alternative hypothesis’.
- A new batch of more than 5,000 emails and other documents hacked from the CRU were released just ahead of the UN Climate summit (the UNFCCC COP17) in Durban in late 2011 but didn’t generate the intense media interest of the initial 2009 release because it was seen as a poor attempt to disrupt the Durban meeting.

Links to other core scripts

Topical issues > Climategate > IPCC error concerns

External links

The Muir Russell-chaired Independent Climate Change Email Review is the most comprehensive assessment of the incident. DECC briefing is stored at D11/1222675

<http://www.cce-review.org/>

The Lord Oxburgh-chaired Scientific Appraisal Panel looked at the science in more detail. DECC briefing is stored at D11/1222650

<http://www.uea.ac.uk/mac/comm/media/press/CRUstatements/SAP>

The House of Commons Committee held two inquiries:

The disclosure of climate data from the Climatic Research Unit at the University of East Anglia

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/science-and-technology-committee/inquiries/uea/> .

The Government response is available on the Committee website (coordinated by DECC).

The Reviews into the University of East Anglia's Climatic Research Unit's E-mails:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/science-and-technology-committee/inquiries/100831-new-inquiry---reviews-into-crus-e-mails/>

The Government response is available on the Committee website (coordinated by GO-Science).