

Hacked archive provides fodder for climate sceptics

- 17:59 24 November 2009 by [Fred Pearce](#)
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- Climate scientists are reeling this week from the discovery that someone has hacked into the email archive of one of their most prestigious research centres, the [Climate Research Unit \(CRU\) of the University of East Anglia](#), UK, custodian of the most respected global temperature record.

Climate sceptics have gleefully blogged that the emails, now widely published on the internet, reveal extensive data manipulation and expose a conspiracy behind global warming research. An analysis by *New Scientist* finds scant evidence of data abuse, but does show persistent efforts to suppress work by climate sceptics.

Mostly the researchers are exposed as doing what they are supposed to do: engaging in an often adversarial process to arrive at the truth. One long exchange ends: "This is ultimately about science, it's not personal."

Those contacted by *New Scientist* by and large had simple explanations for their statements. One 1999 email by Phil Jones, director of the CRU, has been the focus of media coverage since news of the leak broke last Thursday. In it, Jones discusses using "Mike's *Nature* trick" to "hide the decline" in temperatures. "Mike" Mann, of Pennsylvania State University in University Park, told *New Scientist* the "trick" was simply a published device to extend to the present a graph of temperatures derived from the analysis of tree ring data. This is done using real thermometer data.

Ostracising critics

What will prove more damaging is evidence that the researchers, who often attack their critics for not publishing in peer-reviewed journals, have sought to ostracise journals that did publish them.

In a 2003 email, Mann discusses encouraging colleagues to "no longer submit [papers] to, or cite papers in" *Climate Research*, after it published papers by known sceptics "that couldn't get published in a reputable journal". Mann says his complaint was that the peer-review process had been distorted to allow "extremely poor papers" to be published and points out that the journal's editor-in-chief and half the editorial board had resigned in protest.

But other comments are more difficult to justify. In 2004, Jones said of two published papers he regards as flawed: "I can't see either... being in the next Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report. Kevin [Trenberth] and I will keep them out somehow – even if we have to redefine what the peer-review literature is!"

"Let me assure you there was no attempt to keep any material out of the IPCC assessments," Trenberth, of the US National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado, told *New Scientist*.

The correspondence also shows researchers trying to prevent critics gaining access to raw data,

notably the CRU's temperature data. Publicly, they say that much of the data is covered by confidentiality agreements that prevent them sharing it. For instance, an agreement with the UK's Met Office seen by *New Scientist* limits access to "bona fide researchers working on agreed scientific programmes".

But equally the emails reveal researchers adamantly opposed to releasing hard-earned data to critics, to avert what they see as time-consuming harassment. This week's events suggest those decisions were ill-advised.