

UK climate scientist to temporarily step down

December 1 2009, By RAPHAEL G. SATTER , Associated Press Writer



Nicholas Stern, chair of the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at the London School of Economics, listens to a reporter's question during a news conference in central London, Tuesday Dec. 1, 2009. The leading British climate change economist says the science of climate change is based on sound scientific methods and those who doubt the science of global warming are 'muddled and confused.' Hackers broke into the computer systems of the University of East Anglia climate research unit last month and posted documents online. Some bloggers claim the document shows scientists have overstated the case for global warming and have attempted to manipulate data. (AP Photo/Lefteris Pitarakis)

(AP) -- The chief of a prestigious British research center caught in a storm of controversy over claims that he and others suppressed data about climate change has stepped down pending an investigation, the University of East Anglia said Tuesday.

The university said in a statement that Phil Jones, whose e-mails were

among the thousands of pieces of correspondence leaked to the Internet late last month, would relinquish his position as director of Climatic Research Unit until the completion of an independent review.

The university's Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research Trevor Davies said the investigation would cover data security, whether the university responded properly to Freedom of Information requests, "and any other relevant issues." The statement said the specific terms of the review will be announced later in the week.

Jones has been accused by skeptics of man-made [climate change](#) of manipulating data to support his research. In particular, many have pointed to a leaked e-mail in which Jones writes that he had used a "trick" to "hide the decline" in a chart detailing recent [global temperatures](#). Jones has denied manipulating evidence and insisted his comment had been misunderstood, explaining that he'd used the word trick "as in a clever thing to do."

Davies said there was nothing in the stolen material to suggest the peer-reviewed publications by the unit "are not of the highest-quality of scientific investigation and interpretation."

But the correspondence from Jones and others - which appears to include discussions of how to keep critical work out of peer-reviewed journals and efforts to shield scientists' data and methodology from outside scrutiny - have been seized upon by those who are fighting efforts to impose caps on emissions of carbon dioxide as evidence of a scientific conspiracy.

Sen. James Inhofe, an Oklahoma Republican and a vocal skeptic of global warming, called Tuesday for Senate hearings on the e-mails. In a letter to Sen. Barbara Boxer, a California Democrat who chairs the environment committee, Inhofe said the e-mails could have far-reaching

policy implications for the United States. Both Congress and the Environmental Protection Agency are taking action to curb global warming based on a report that uses data produced by the Climate Research Unit.

A House committee has scheduled a hearing Wednesday on the status of climate science. Two prominent Obama administration scientists - White House science adviser John Holdren and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration administrator Jane Lubchenco - are expected to be questioned about the e-mails.

Davies defended Jones and his colleagues, saying the publication of their e-mails "is the latest example of a sustained and, in some instances, a vexatious campaign" to undermine climate science. The sentiment was echoed by Nicholas Stern, a leading climate change economist, who said the person or people who posted the leaked e-mails had muddled the debate at a critical moment.

"It has created confusion and confusion never helps scientific discussions," Stern told reporters in London Tuesday. "The degree of skepticism among real scientists is very small."

Governments are in the final days of preparations for Copenhagen conference, which is due to outline a new climate change agreement. Stern said the stakes were very high, explaining that if countries did not manage to reach agreement, world temperatures could rise by five degrees Celsius (nine degrees Fahrenheit) by the end of the century, making much of the world uninhabitable.

"We have a moment now when we could get a strategy agreed," Stern said. "If it were to dissolve in disarray it would not be easy to put this momentum back together again."

A group of scientists who run the RealClimate Web site - including Gavin Schmidt at the NASA space agency and Michael Mann at Pennsylvania State University - have now begun posting links to their data sources online in the stated interest of making the science "as open and transparent as possible."

On the Net:

RealClimate: <http://www.realclimate.org/>

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Citation: UK climate scientist to temporarily step down (2009, December 1) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-12-uk-climate-scientist-temporarily.html>

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