

Watchdog: UK university hid climate data

January 28 2010, By SYLVIA HUI , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- The university at the center of a climate change dispute over stolen e-mails broke freedom of information laws by refusing to handle public requests for climate data, Britain's data-protection watchdog said Thursday.

A cache of e-mail exchanges between leading [climate scientists](#) that were stolen from the University of East Anglia's climate research unit and recently made public show that the institution ignored at least one request from the public for data, the Information Commissioner's Office said.

The watchdog said it received complaints about the university from David Holland, a retired engineer, in 2007 to 2008, but it has only recently come to light that his requests for data were ignored.

"The e-mails which are now public reveal that Mr. Holland's requests under the Freedom of Information Act were not dealt with as they should have been under the legislation," it said in a statement.

The thousands of leaked e-mails - made public on the Internet just before the U.N. summit on global warming in Copenhagen in December - sparked an international debate over whether scientists had exaggerated the case for man-made climate change.

Climate skeptics - including Republican lawmakers in the U.S. - claimed that the e-mails showed scientists secretly manipulated climate data and suppressed contrary views about climate change.

One of the e-mails disparaged climate skeptics, and a scientist said "the last thing I need is news articles claiming to question temperature increases."

Another complained about "getting hassled by a couple of people" to release temperature data that suggests uncertainties about [climate change](#). "Don't any of you three tell anybody that the U.K. has a Freedom of Information Act," Phil Jones, the director of climate research unit, wrote in one [e-mail](#).

Jones temporarily stepped aside as unit director as an investigation into the matter proceeds. He has said the comments have been taken out of context and there never was an intent to manipulate data.

The Information Commissioner's Office said it could not prosecute the university for its breaches because it was too late to do so - it said the law requires action within six months of the offense taking place.

Edward Acton, the university's vice chancellor, denied that it hid data from the public and said there may have been a "misunderstanding."

He told the BBC on Thursday that most raw data at the climate research center have long been publicly available.

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Citation: Watchdog: UK university hid climate data (2010, January 28) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-01-watchdog-uk-university-hid-climate.html>

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