

Climate study gets pulled over plagiarism

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Evidence of plagiarism and complaints about the peer-review process have led a statistics journal to retract a federally funded study that condemned scientific support for global warming.

The study, which appeared in 2008 in the [journal](#) Computational Statistics and Data Analysis, was headed by [statistician](#) Edward Wegman of George Mason University in Fairfax, Va. Its analysis was an outgrowth of a controversial congressional report that Wegman headed in 2006. The "Wegman Report" suggested climate scientists colluded in their studies and questioned whether global warming was real. The report has since become a touchstone among [climate change](#) naysayers.

The journal publisher's legal team "has decided to retract the study," said CSDA journal editor Stanley Azen of the University of Southern California, following complaints of plagiarism. A November review by three plagiarism experts of the 2006 congressional report for USA Today also concluded that portions contained text from [Wikipedia](#) and textbooks. The journal study, co-authored by Wegman student Yasmin Said, detailed part of the congressional report's analysis.

"Neither Dr. Wegman nor Dr. Said has ever engaged in plagiarism," says their attorney, Milton Johns, by email. In a March 16 email to the journal, Wegman blamed a student who "had basically copied and pasted" from others' work into the 2006 congressional report, and said the text was lifted without acknowledgment and used in the journal study. "We would never knowingly publish plagiarized material," wrote Wegman, a former CSDA journal editor.

Plagiarism can result in research sanctions from federal funding authorities, says federal Office of Research Integrity's John Dahlberg. He would not say whether ORI was investigating the researchers.

The congressional report, requested by [global warming](#) skeptic Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas, and the study concluded that [climate scientists](#) favorably publish one another's work because of too-close collaboration. They suggested this led to the consensus that the Earth is warming.

A 2009 National Academy of Sciences report found that climate studies show average global temperatures have increased 1.4 degrees in the past century, for example.

The study concluded that top scientists shouldn't collaborate. Instead, studies where a "principal author tends to co-author papers with younger colleagues who were his students" would produce less-biased results. Barton reiterated his support for the report last fall.

Computer scientist Ted Kirkpatrick of Canada's Simon Fraser University filed a complaint with the journal after reading the climate science website Deep Climate, which first noted plagiarism in the Wegman Report in 2009. "There is something beyond ironic about a study of the conduct of science having ethics problems," Kirkpatrick says.

Azen says the study seemed novel and important at a time when social networking studies were "hot." Johns says his clients "stand by their work" despite the retraction.

George Mason University said in 2010 that it was investigating the charges of [plagiarism](#). University spokesman Dan Walsch says the study retraction was a "personnel matter" and declined to comment.

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