

Global warming contrarian researcher investigated for not revealing funding sources

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For several years, aerospace engineer Willie Wei-Hock Soon, with the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics (CfA) has been a well known figure in the debate regarding the cause of global warming. While most scientists have maintained that the elevated temperatures are due to increased greenhouse gases in the atmosphere from man-made processes, such as coal and gasoline burning, Soon has insisted that it is instead caused by normal fluctuations of the sun. Taking such a contrarian view has led to praise from those that support his views, and harsh criticism from those who do not.

Soon is in the spotlight again, this time facing accusations that he has not disclosed funding he has received when publishing research papers. His accusers suggest that he has received most of his funding from energy

companies which would constitute a conflict of interest. Most respected journals require the authors of research papers to state in their paper that they report no conflict of interest.

Documents obtained via the Freedom of Information Act, by workers with Greenpeace which were subsequently given to investigators at the Climate Investigations Center (CIC) indicate that Soon received approximately \$1.2 million in funding over the past fourteen years from companies such as Exxon Mobile, the American Petroleum Institute and most heavily, Southern Company, one of the largest electricity producers (which relies mostly on coal) in the country. Further research by investigators at CIC revealed that Soon did not disclose his ties to such funding organizations on nine [research papers](#) published in several different journals, in which he offers contrarian views on the cause of [global warming](#). Also among the documents was a contract between CfA and Southern Company in which representatives with CfA promised to provide notification before publicly disclosing Southern Company as a [funding](#) source.

Also, because the CfA is partially funded by the U.S. government, representatives with Greenpeace have written letters to several congressional representatives asking that an investigation be undertaken to ascertain whether public funds were misused.

In light of the recent allegations, the CfA has launched an investigation of its own regarding disclosure issues regarding Soon. And finally, because the investigation is still ongoing, it is not yet clear what action journal editors will take regarding already published articles by Soon, or what will occur going forward.

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