



CLIMATE DEBATE TURNS FOUL

Scientists are being **INTIMIDATED AND HARASSED** because of their research, they tell Congress

CHERYL HOGUE, C&EN WASHINGTON

THREATS AND harassment, including a dead rat delivered to his front door, have been part of Benjamin D. Santer's life for the past 14 years.

Santer, a climate scientist at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, was the convening lead author of the chapter of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 1996 assessment that made the historic conclusion that "the balance of evidence suggests that there is a discernible human influence on global climate."

"This sentence changed my life," Santer said at a hearing on climate science in the political arena held by the House Select Committee on Energy Independence & Global Warming on May 20. Santer testified before the committee as a private citizen and not in his professional capacity.

Shortly after the IPCC report was published, several global warming skeptics publicly accused Santer of political tampering, abuses of the peer review system, and irregularities in his scientific work. Despite detailed responses from Santer and IPCC refuting those charges, the accusations continue. "The allegations remain much more newsworthy than the rebuttals," he stated.

Stephen H. Schneider, a climate scientist at Stanford University and a key contributor to IPCC's assessments, told the committee

that he, like others in his field, gets menacing e-mails frequently. These missives, Schneider said, often paint him as a "communist dupe of the UN" who is trying "to take away American religious and economic freedom" and who deserves to be hanged.

In public meetings, spirited discourse on climate change has been replaced with skeptics shouting down those with other points of view, said Schneider, the author of the 2009 book "Science As a Contact Sport: Inside the Battle To Save Earth's Climate." "Things have become accusatory and highly ideological," he said.

Harassment can turn especially creepy when it comes to the threshold of a scientist's home. Santer said that some years ago, he answered a knock at the door of his home late in the evening, only to find a dead rat. On the street, a man in a yellow Hummer screamed curses at Santer and sped off, he said.

Threats have increased in the past six months, since hacked e-mails from climate

researchers at the University of East Anglia, in England, were posted on the Internet and created a furor, Santer continued. Some of those hacked e-mails were sent to or were from him (C&EN, Dec. 21, 2009, page 11).

Since then, Santer told the committee, the threats in anonymous e-mails he's gotten "have become of more concern," but he did not elaborate.

"IT'S VERY TROUBLING to me to think that because of the job that I do and because of findings I've obtained, my loved ones would be in harm's way," Santer testified. "I firmly believe that I would now be leading a different life if my research suggested that there was no human effect on climate."

"I worry about this type of intimidation," Ralph J. Cicerone, president of the National Academy of Sciences, told the committee, especially when federal laboratories are seeking to attract young scientists, he added. "An atmosphere of civility and of encouraging scientists to seek the truth and to share their findings is always needed."

"We need to follow the research wherever it leads us, without fear of the consequences of speaking truth to power," Santer told the committee.

Committee members also called for science to be free of intimidation.

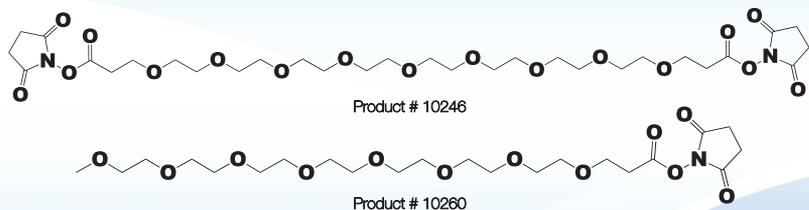
"Finding errors in data and critiquing scientific work is the legitimate path to truth," said Rep. F. James Sensenbrenner Jr. (R-Wis.), the top Republican on the committee. "Ridicule and attempts to besmirch reputations have no place in this debate," he said, adding that disrespect of those who are skeptical of global warming is also unacceptable.

Sensenbrenner charged that some Democrats on the committee bullied Christopher Lord Monckton, who disputes that global warming is human induced, at a May 6 hearing on climate-change science. Monckton is chief policy adviser at the Science & Public Policy Institute, a nonprofit group that says it supports "sensible public policies for energy and the environment rooted in rational science and economics." At the May 6 hearing, lawmakers from both sides of the aisle questioned the scientific credentials of witnesses, portraying those

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they disagreed with as politically motivated.

Also discussed at the committee's May 20 hearing was the scientific data supporting the conclusion that climate change is due to human activities. Sensenbrenner said the recent e-mail controversy "revealed a scientific culture that is more interested in defending its findings than in finding truth. It showed some of the most prominent scientists in the world actively working to sabotage legitimate scientists who dared to challenge their work." And, the congressman said, the e-mails raise legitimate questions about the consensus on human-caused climate change.

Committee Chairman Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), countered that climate-change reports released earlier this month by the National Research Council "reinforce the overwhelming foundation of knowledge we have about the danger of carbon pollution. This is a foundation still unshaken by a manufactured scandal over stolen e-mails" (C&EN, May 24, page 24).

MARIO MOLINA, a chemistry professor at the University of California, San Diego, told the committee that some critics liken the science concluding that climate change is human induced to a house of cards: A single error will collapse the whole thing. But, he said, this analogy is incorrect. A better comparison is a not-yet-complete jigsaw puzzle: Some pieces may be missing or in the wrong place, but the overall image is clearly visible, said Molina, who shared the 1995 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for his work linking stratospheric ozone depletion to chlorofluorocarbons.

Meanwhile, Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.) called for scrutiny of federal climate-change research programs because, she said, "recent investigations have shown how academic researchers misused federal funds through distorting data to manipulate lawmakers into adopting certain positions on climate change."

Blackburn didn't provide any details to support the claim of data distortion, but a spokesman for her said after the hearing that she was referring to a February report from Republicans on the Senate Environment & Public Works Committee. That report concludes that the e-mail scandal seriously compromised the scientific consensus of IPCC and the conclusion that emissions from human activities are changing the climate. The report also says that the Senate panel's Republicans continue to investigate whether any federal laws or policies were violated. ■

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