

# Hacked E-Mails Add Fuel To Climate Naysayers' Fire

by Jon Hamilton

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Scientists attending the American Meteorological Society meeting in Atlanta say the field has weathered a storm created two months ago when hackers released e-mails from some prominent climate scientists. They say the e-mails revealed bad behavior by a small number of researchers and revealed some weaknesses in the scientific process. But the scientists say the e-mails did nothing to undermine the data showing that climate change is real.

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RENEE MONTAGNE, host:

When hackers released some emails a couple of months ago of some of the world's leading experts on global warming, it caused them huge embarrassment. The messages revealed ugly sniping going on behind the public discourse. Climate change skeptics have pointed to those emails as evidence that global warming is a hoax. And even believers say the emails raise questions about scientific conduct.

NPR's Jon Hamilton wanted to see just how hot things have gotten in the world of climate science, so he spent some time in Atlanta with researchers at the annual meeting of the American Meteorological Society.

JON HAMILTON: The most notorious email seemed to discuss ways to prevent publication of research that challenged global warming. One also used the unfortunate word trick to describe a technique to massage temperature data. That sort of stuff has certainly made things more difficult for public figures trying to get limits on carbon dioxide emissions and other greenhouse gases.

But researchers in the trenches of climate science say there's really been no effect on the consensus that the Earth really is warming up.

(Soundbite of crowd)

HAMILTON: The trenches at the meteorological society meeting can be found in a vast underground chamber at the Georgia World Congress Center. Its filled with seemingly endless aisles of so called poster presentations and their authors.

Kevin Golbert(ph) of Valpraiso University in Indiana is standing in front of his poster describing trends in Australian cyclones.

Mr. KEVIN GOLBERT (Valpraiso University): Also I dont think there was anything within the emails that really, you know, caused a great debate within the scientific community about the validity of the climate science.

HAMILTON: Not far away, Dave Gustler(ph) from the University of New Mexico has a poster about 20th century droughts in the U.S. Gustler says he and his colleagues tend to focus on climate data, not commentary, and he says the data havent changed.

Mr. DAVE GUSTLER (University of New Mexico): There are multiple lines of evidence that involve both completely independent data sets such as glacier retreat, plus a whole body of modeling plus a lot of process based research about measuring heat in the oceans, things like that, that all point in the same direction.

HAMILTON: But Gustler says the mails have shown something most researchers already knew about climate science but the public may not have.

Mr. GUSTLER: Its contentious, its sometimes nasty. Thats because we're people and we are dealing with problems that people care about very intensely both for personal and professional reasons and because the public cares about it.

HAMILTON: Marcus Williams(ph) is a graduate student at Florida State University whose poster describes temperature variability in the Southeastern U.S. Williams says the nastiness of the emails has hurt the field, even if it hasnt undermined the science.

Mr. MARCUS WILLIAMS: It did take a hit on our credibility somewhat. I mean, its never great to have people kind of pushing false agendas out there.

HAMILTON: The emails werent part of the meetings formal program. But they did come up frequently in sessions about climate. And one question scientists had was how to restore their damaged credibility. Chris Fallen(ph) from the U.K.s meteorological office says one way would be to let everybody see the data that scientists have been using.

Mr. CHRIS FALLEN (U.K. Meteorological Office): It should be very good to make all the data sets available that contribute to that land surface temperature data set and of course the sea surface temperature data set. And indeed all the other major data sets as are used in climate science.

HAMILTON: Fallen concedes that could be tricky, though, because much of the data is proprietary. Other researchers suggested a new focus on the ethical issues involved in

publishing climate studies. They say the emails show that the peer review process can allow personal views rather than objective evaluation to affect where a paper gets published. Bill Hook is in charge of policy for the American Meteorological Society. He says climate researchers need to realize that they are now in a very bright spotlight and act accordingly.

Mr. BILL HOOK (American Meteorological Society): This science has gone from a science that's a side show and human affairs to science that matters. It's a science where people are placing billion dollar and even trillion dollar bets, and that requires a certain level of professionalism and caution about all communication.

HAMILTON: Hook says the email incident has offered climate scientists a pointed reminder of just how much is at stake and how easily things can go awry.

Jon Hamilton, NPR News.