

Scientific Integrity at Risk:
Examples of Science Abuses by the Bush Administration

Abstinence-Only Education

- The Bush Administration abandoned tracking outcome measures such as charting the birth rate of female program participants to assess whether abstinence-only education programs achieved their intended purposes.¹
- According to a source at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Bush Administration officials forced agency staff to discontinue and abandon a project called “Programs that Work,” which identified comprehensive sex education programs found to be effective in scientific studies.²
- A study requested by the office of Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-CA), found that 80% of abstinence-only curricula used by over two-thirds of Special Programs of Regional and National Significance (SPRANS) grantees in 2003³ contain false, misleading, or distorted information about the effectiveness of contraceptives, the risks of abortion, and the transmission of HIV/AIDS. Many of the curricula treat religious views or gender stereotypes as scientific facts. For example, some curricula state that life begins at conception; one calls a 43-day old fetus a “thinking person.”⁴ Another teaches that women need “financial support,” while men need “admiration.” Another instructs: “Women gauge their happiness and judge their success on their relationships. Men’s happiness and success hinge on their accomplishments.”⁵

Breast Cancer

- Despite objections from CDC staff and several exhaustive scientific studies finding no tie between breast cancer and abortion, information on the National Cancer Institute (NCI) Web site was changed to read that the studies on the topic were inconsistent.⁶ After significant public pressure, NCI again revised its Web site to state that “having an abortion or miscarriage does not increase a woman's subsequent risk of developing breast cancer.”⁷

Clear Skies Act

- As an alternative to the president’s Clear Skies Act, Senators Thomas Carper (D-DE), Judd Gregg (R-NH), Lamar Alexander (R-TN), and Lincoln Chafee (R-RI) proposed a measure that would control carbon dioxide in addition to sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and mercury. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) evaluated this proposal but long withheld important results on the costs and benefits of the alternative bill from the senators. Several months before the EPA finally provided them the results; a copy of an internal EPA briefing based on the study was leaked to the *Washington Post*. According to the briefing, the EPA concluded that the Senate proposal would cut the three pollutants earlier and in larger quantities than the Clear Skies Act, result in 17,800 fewer expected deaths by 2020, and reduce carbon dioxide emissions at “negligible” cost to industry.⁸

Emergency Contraception

- In 2003, a joint hearing of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Nonprescription Drugs and Reproductive Health Drugs Advisory Committees voted 23 to 4 that the FDA make Plan B® emergency contraception available over the counter.⁹ An internal FDA agency memo, obtained by the *Washington Post*, suggested the FDA medical reviewers supported nonprescription status but were overruled by senior officials.¹⁰ In 2004, despite panel and staff recommendations, the FDA decision delayed approval of over-the-counter availability.
- In January 2005, the FDA announced that it will continue to delay approval of Plan B for over-the-counter availability.¹¹

Endangered Species

- A number of amendments before Congress that are supported by the Administration would make it harder to list threatened species as endangered by limiting the use of population

modeling, a technique that is considered the most credible way to assess the chances of survival of a species in a habitat.¹²

Fish and Wildlife Service

- On February 2005, the Union of Concerned Scientists released a survey of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service scientists showing that one in five scientists reported being instructed to inappropriately exclude scientific information from official documents, while 42 percent said they “could not openly express concerns about the biological needs of species and habitat without fear of retaliation.”¹³

Global Warming

- In September 2002, the Administration removed a section on climate change from the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) annual air pollution report. This report had contained a section on climate change for the past five years.¹⁴
- *The New York Times* reported that the White House tried to force the EPA to substantially alter another report on climate change in 2003. Interviews with current and former EPA staff revealed that the Administration demanded a number of amendments including the insertion of a discredited study of temperature records which was funded in part by the American Petroleum Institute.¹⁵

HIV/AIDS Prevention

- Prior to 2002, the CDC’s Web site included information on proper condom use, the effectiveness of different types of condoms, and studies showing that condom education does not promote sexual activity.¹⁶ In 2002, the Bush Administration directed agency staff to replace this information with a document that emphasizes condom failure rates and the effectiveness of abstinence.¹⁷
- Reproductive health providers are a major source of preventive health care and are important early points for HIV prevention for millions of individuals, including women. Yet, U.S. global funding for HIV/AIDS commits the majority of funds for services for people living with HIV and for abstinence-only education, leaving the skills and knowledge of these providers largely untapped.¹⁸

Mercury Standards

- In 2003, the FDA and EPA issued an unprecedented joint warning to women and young children about increased health threats from eating mercury-laden fish. At the same time, the Bush administration ignored science and its own agencies’ recommendations, and promoted weaker air standards that in turn would allow even more mercury pollution into the air.¹⁹ EPA employees revealed that political appointees at the agency bypassed scientific and professional staff and a federal advisory panel in the creation of the proposed new rules.²⁰

Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care

- An analysis comparing an altered final version of a 2003 Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) report to the original draft showed that 28 mentions of the word "disparity" were removed from the final version’s executive summary; a conclusion stating that health care disparities "are national problems" was deleted; and a passage listing disparities relating to cancer, HIV and cardiac care was replaced with a reference to low use of cholesterol tests.²¹

Salmon Policy

- According to a leading ecologist and scientist on an advisory panel at the Nation Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), science-based recommendations provided by the panel were suppressed and removed by NMFS officials from an official report. Not only were these scientific recommendations suppressed, but the Bush Administration’s new policy on salmon populations is based on old or discredited information, which directly contradicts the findings provided by the scientific advisory panel.²²

Scientific Advisory Panels

- In August of 2002, HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson replaced fifteen members of an eighteen member panel at the CDC's National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH) without consulting NCEH Director Richard Jackson. According to a report in *Science* magazine, a number of the new appointees were prominent industry consultants and critics of federal regulation.²³
- In the summer of 2002, just weeks before the CDC Advisory Committee on Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention's scheduled meeting, HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson took the unusual step of rejecting nominees selected by CDC staff and appointed five individuals who were all distinguished by the likelihood that they would oppose tightening the federal lead poisoning standard.²⁴
- President Bush dismissed two members of the Presidential Advisory Council on Bioethics in February of 2004. Both ejected members are well-respected scientists who hold views running counter to the President and other Council-members' beliefs on issues including stem cell research.²⁵
- In June 2004 the Bush Administration demanded that the World Health Organization (WHO) first clear all US government scientists with HHS before they could be appointed as delegates to WHO meetings or serve on WHO panels.²⁶

Stem Cell Research

- President Bush claimed that despite his restrictions on federal funding for research using new stem cell lines, scientists would still have access to more than 60 existing cell lines. When scientists challenged that number, the Administration continued to maintain the availability of dozens of lines.²⁷ An NIH official admitted that instead of 60, only 11 cell lines are available for use in research.²⁸

Water Quality and Mountaintop Removal Mining

- Documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act reveal that J. Stephan Griles, deputy secretary at the US Department of the Interior and former lobbyist for the National Mining Association, instructed scientists and staff to intentionally disregard extensive scientific studies conducted by five separate federal and state agencies over four years in preparation for an environmental impact statement on mountaintop removal mining in Appalachia,²⁹ which affects mountain streams' water quality and quantity.

Yucca Mountain

- Despite promising to depend on "sound science" in the creation of a nuclear waste repository in Yucca Mountain³⁰, President Bush rushed through a plan that ignored the National Academy of Science's findings on the proposed Yucca Mountain plan. The courts just ruled the plan illegal, because the EPA issued inadequate environmental and public health standards for the proposed Yucca Mountain nuclear repository site, ordering the plan to be made safer.³⁰

¹ Federal Register 65:69562-65, November 17, 2000. "The Effectiveness of Abstinence-Only Education" Investigating the State of Science. U.S. House Committee on Government Reform minority staff report, URL: http://www.house.gov/reform/min/politicsandscience/example_abstinence.htm, Accessed April 2004.

² *Scientific Integrity in Policymaking: An Investigation into the Bush Administration's Misuse of Science*. Union of Concerned Scientists, http://www.ucsusa.org/global_environment/rsi/page.cfm?pageID=1355
Author interview with current CDC staff member, name withheld on request, November 2003.

³ *The Content of Federally Funded Abstinence-Only Education Programs*. Prepared for Rep. Henry A. Waxman. URL: <http://www.democrats.reform.house.gov/Documents/20041201102153-50247.pdf>, Accessed February 2005.

⁴ *The Content of Federally Funded Abstinence-Only Education Programs*. Prepared for Rep. Henry A. Waxman. URL: <http://www.democrats.reform.house.gov/Documents/20041201102153-50247.pdf>, Accessed February 2005.

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- ⁸ *Multiple Air Pollutants Information Censored*. Union of Concerned Scientists, http://www.ucsusa.org/global_environment/rsi/page.cfm?pageID=1365, Accessed February 2005.
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- ¹¹ *Center Sues FDA for Denying Women Over-the-Counter Access to Emergency Contraception*. Center for Reproductive Rights, URL: http://www.crlp.org/pr_05_0121planb.html, Accessed February 2005.
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- ¹³ *U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Survey Summary*. Union of Concerned Scientists, http://www.ucsusa.org/global_environment/rsi/page.cfm?pageID=1601, Accessed February 2005.
- ¹⁴ *Scientific Integrity in Policymaking: An Investigation into the Bush Administration's Misuse of Science*. Union of Concerned Scientists, http://www.ucsusa.org/global_environment/rsi/page.cfm?pageID=13563 See www.epa.gov/airtrends.
- ¹⁵ A.C. Revkin and K.Q. Seelye, "Report by EPA Leaves Out Data on Climate Change," *New York Times*, 07/19/03.
- ¹⁶ *Scientific Integrity in Policymaking: An Investigation into the Bush Administration's Misuse of Science*. Interview conducted by the Union of Concerned Scientists. Author interview with current CDC staffer, name withheld on request, November 2003
- ¹⁷ "Politics and Science: Investigating the State of Science Under the Bush Administration." Presented by Congressman Henry Waxman. Accessed at: http://www.house.gov/reform/min/politicsandscience/example_condoms.htm
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- ²¹ "A Case Study in Politics and Science: Changes to the National Healthcare Disparities Report," U.S. House Committee on Government Reform minority staff report, URL: http://www.house.gov/reform/min/politicsandscience/example_disparities.htm
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- ²⁸ Kennedy, Donald. "Stem cells: Still here, still waiting," *Science*, 2003; 300: 865.
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