

## Scientists Report Political Interference

By Christopher Lee, Washington Post Staff Writer, 4/24/08

More than half the [Environmental Protection Agency](#) scientists who responded to an independent survey made public yesterday said that they had witnessed political interference in scientific decisions at the agency during the past five years.

The claim comes from a new report by the [Union of Concerned Scientists](#), a nonprofit advocacy group that sent questionnaires to 5,500 EPA scientists and obtained 1,586 responses. Among the scientists' complaints were that data sometimes were used selectively to justify a specific regulatory outcome and that political appointees had directed them to inappropriately exclude or alter technical information in EPA scientific documents.

"Things are not as they should be at the EPA," said Francesca Grifo, director of the group's scientific integrity program. "Scientific findings are being suppressed and distorted; 889 scientists personally experienced at least one type of political interference. . . . Scientists are being pressured by outside interests."

More than 100 respondents identified the [Office of Management and Budget](#) as the source of the interference, while hundreds also blamed industry groups and other agencies, Grifo said. Morale is down because of such pressures, she said.

EPA spokesman Jonathan Shradar said the findings will not change anything. He said EPA Administrator [Stephen L. Johnson](#), a career scientist at the agency for 27 years, carefully weighs the input of staff scientists in making key policy decisions.

"The work we do here at EPA is work we are all very passionate about," Shradar said. "When there are difficult policy decisions, not all the time does that line up with where our passions have directed us. Sometimes we disagree. . . . But the scientists at EPA are the best in the world, and their work will continue to be a valued part of any regulatory action we take."

[Rep. Henry A. Waxman](#) (D-Calif.), chairman of the [House Oversight and Government Reform Committee](#), sent a letter to Johnson yesterday telling him to prepare to answer questions about the survey findings at a hearing next month.

"These survey results suggest a pattern of ignoring and manipulating science in EPA's decision making," Waxman wrote.

Survey participants included employees with training in geology, engineering, life science, toxicology and chemistry, although not necessarily at the graduate level. More than 6 in 10 respondents have been at the agency for a decade or longer. Respondents worked at headquarters, 10 regional offices and 12 EPA laboratories. Those most likely to report

political interference work in offices involved in writing regulations or conducting risk assessments of potentially harmful agents, the advocacy group said.

Conducted between June and September of last year, the survey was not based on a random sample, and its findings are not scientific. But Grifo contended that it represents the first attempt to more broadly assess a problem that has frequently surfaced in anecdotal reports alleging the pollution of science by political considerations at the nation's premier environmental agency.

For instance, a congressional committee recently reported that EPA staff members had determined in December that greenhouse gas emissions endanger public health, but the regulatory process stalled after the EPA forwarded the findings to the [White House](#).

The EPA also drew fire last month for weakening its new limits on smog-forming ozone after a last-minute intervention by [President Bush](#). And Johnson was criticized for his decision in December to deny California's petition to limit greenhouse gas emissions from cars and trucks, overruling the unanimous recommendation of the agency's legal and technical staffs.

"It's hard to really know. Are those isolated incidents or did they really constitute a pattern and a trend?" Grifo said. "The advantage of these surveys is that they make that leap for us, from the anecdotal to real trends within the agency."



## **Doctors Feel Push to Downplay Injuries: Group Tells OSHA of Pressure By Companies**

By Ames Alexander, The Charlotte Observer, N.C.

Apr. 19--NEW YORK -- A leading group of occupational doctors is taking the unusual step of speaking out publicly against pressure from companies to downplay workplace injuries.

To outline their concerns, the physicians have sent a letter to federal workplace safety regulators and held a conference session in New York City on Monday. They're also planning to testify before Congress.

If successful, their campaign could affect the treatment of injured workers and might help change how the government assesses workplace safety.

"Our members feel they are being methodically pressured ... to under-treat and mistreat," said Dr. Robert McLellan, president of the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. "...This is a grave ethical concern for our members. It's a grave medical concern."

His group represents 5,000 doctors; some treat workers referred to them by employers, while others work directly for companies.

Employers are supposed to record all injuries requiring time off work or medical treatment beyond first aid. It's an honor system, and the injury logs are used by regulators and others to gauge plant safety. Low injury rates allow companies to avoid scrutiny from workplace safety regulators and may help managers earn four-figure bonuses.

In a hotel meeting room in New York, doctors said this helps explain why some employers urge them not to treat injuries in a way that would make them reportable. A cut, for instance, must be recorded if the worker gets stitches, one doctor told the room of more than 60 colleagues. But if the doctor simply covers the cut with a bandage, it doesn't have to be reported.

Workplace injury and illness rates -- a key factor in determining whether regulators inspect a company -- have been declining nationwide in recent years. But some experts suspect that's partly because employers aren't reporting all on-the-job injuries.

McLellan, an associate professor at Dartmouth Medical School in New Hampshire, says he thinks employers are "vastly underreporting" the extent of workplace injuries.

"Players in the system may willfully produce records that don't reflect reality," he said in an interview.

He said he grew more concerned about corporate pressures on doctors in September, during a conference in the Carolinas. Since then, he said, he has heard from dozens of doctors.

That led him to contact the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and he expects to discuss his concerns with top agency officials next month. His group will likely propose that OSHA more vigorously investigate the accuracy of company injury logs. It may also ask regulators to rely on a broader array of workplace safety measures -- and to rewrite rules so that companies have fewer incentives to underreport.

McLellan also wants occupational doctors to testify before congressional committees examining workplace safety.

Ethical physicians sometimes lose business to those who bend to the wishes of employers, some doctors and workers' compensation lawyers say.

In the Carolinas and some other states, injured workers generally must visit doctors approved by their employers if they want workers' compensation to pay for the treatment. Companies incur higher costs for compensating workers for medical care and lost wages when they're injured on the job.

Employers tend to send workers to doctors who can help them keep costs low and productivity high, according to attorneys who represent injured workers. Doctors become popular with companies if they rarely order time off work for injured employees, or if they seldom recommend costly treatments or conclude injuries are work-related, those lawyers say.

"If you get past the infirmary and sent to a doctor, you're getting sent to a doctor that lives on the plant," said lawyer David Davila, who until recently worked in Columbia, S.C.

Atlanta lawyer Bruce Carraway has represented more than 400 injured poultry workers and says that in more than half of those cases, independent physicians gave different assessments than the company doctors.

Dr. Josephus Bloem, an orthopedic surgeon from Rocky Mount, said he used to get referrals from Perdue Farms. But in the 1990s, the company became unhappy that he usually recommended surgery for workers with carpal tunnel syndrome.

"Their top doctor once visited me and complained that I was too expensive, which I took as pressure to review my approach," Bloem said. Not long afterward, the referrals stopped.

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There are no incentives for building new nuclear plants in the Lieberman-Warner legislation now before the Senate that his Democratic rivals have endorsed, and Mr. McCain suggested Friday that he would not support the measure unless it contained some nuclear power subsidies.

Mr. McCain's proposal in his prepared remarks to impose tariffs on industrializing countries like China and India is also made in the Lieberman-Warner bill and reflects concerns by both industry and labor in the United States and elsewhere in the industrialized world. It would mandate punitive duties on products from any country that did not participate in a global carbon-reduction system, to balance the lower cost of producing goods using dirty-energy sources.

In another contrast with Mr. Bush, Mr. McCain also sought to persuade voters that he had a personal concern and firsthand experience with climate change, which has emerged as a major issue in the 2008 presidential race.

"A few years ago I traveled to the area of Svalbard, Norway — it's a group of islands in the Arctic Ocean," Mr. McCain said. "I was shown the southernmost point where a glacier had reached 20 years earlier. From there, we went northward for miles, up the fjord to see where that same glacier ends today, because all the rest, all the rest, has melted."

Reaction to Mr. McCain proposals from environmental advocates was lukewarm. Several environmental groups said that his plan did not go far enough but that they were grateful to hear a Republican recognizing what they consider an urgent problem and offering a detailed plan to solve it. But Mr. McCain came under considerable criticism for repeatedly opposing federal programs to encourage energy conservation and alternative fuel sources.

Daniel J. Weiss, who heads the global warming program at the Center for American Progress, a Democratic policy shop in Washington, said Mr. McCain had often voted with Democrats on environmental bills but at other times had taken contrary positions.

Elisabeth Bumiller reported from Portland, Ore., and John M. Broder from Washington. Kitty Bennett contributed reporting from Washington.

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Dr. Roger Merrill, Perdue's chief medical officer, said the company had discovered that many workers who got less invasive treatment -- such as splinting, exercise and ibuprofen -- fared better than those who got surgery. "We had a better way to treat folks," he said.

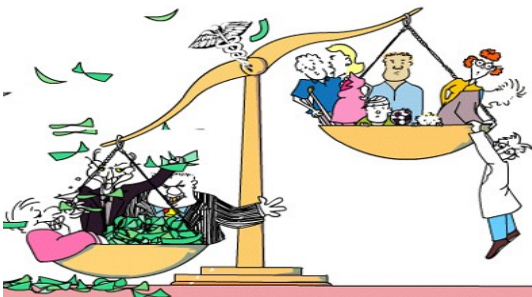
But Bloem wondered whether health concerns were the only factor. "In the end," he said, "the money

wins."

In their quest to keep injuries off logs, company officials without medical training sometimes provide inappropriate treatment, doctors at the New York conference said.

Dr. Peggy Geimer, corporate medical director for a chemical company in Connecticut, spoke of the "tremendous amount of pressure" on company staff to provide treatment beyond their level of expertise.

She recalled how one supervisor dealt with an injured worker who spilled an acidic chemical on his arm: He applied potash, which is sometimes used to clean up chemical spills -- unaware that it would only make the burn worse.



McLellan said he doesn't recall his group ever before taking such a strong stance on the issue. As one doctor at Monday's conference put it: "We need to treat the patient. Not the log."