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Seelye is the one who wrote the mis-leading Superfund articles last year.

June 19, 2003
Report by the E.P.A. Leaves Out Data on Climate Change
By ANDREW C. REVKIN with KATHARINE Q. SEELYE

The Environmental Protection Agency is preparing to publish a draft report next week on the state of the environment, but after editing by the White House, a long section describing risks from rising global temperatures has been whittled to a few noncommittal paragraphs.

The report, commissioned in 2001 by the agency's administrator, Christie Whitman, was intended to provide the first comprehensive review of what is known about various environmental problems, where gaps in understanding exist and how to fill them.

Agency officials said it was tentatively scheduled to be released early next week, before Mrs. Whitman steps down on June 27, ending a troubled time in office that often put her at odds with President Bush.

Drafts of the climate section, with changes sought by the White House, were given to The New York Times yesterday by a former E.P.A. official, along with earlier drafts and an internal memorandum in which some officials protested the changes. Two agency officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the documents were authentic.

The editing eliminated references to many studies concluding that warming is at least partly caused by rising concentrations of smokestack and tail-pipe emissions and could threaten health and ecosystems.

Among the deletions were conclusions about the likely human contribution to warming from a 2001 report on climate by the National Research Council

that the White House had commissioned and that President Bush had endorsed in speeches that year. White House officials also deleted a reference to a 1999 study showing that global temperatures had risen sharply in the previous decade compared with the last 1,000 years. In its place, administration officials added a reference to a new study, partly financed by the American Petroleum Institute, questioning that conclusion.

In the end, E.P.A. staff members, after discussions with administration officials, said they decided to delete the entire discussion to avoid criticism that they were selectively filtering science to suit policy. Administration officials defended the report and said there was nothing untoward about the process that produced it. Mrs. Whitman said that she was "perfectly comfortable" with the edited version and that the differences over climate change should not hold up the broader assessment of the nation's air, land and water.

"The first draft, as with many first drafts, contained everything," she said in a brief telephone interview from the CBS studios in Manhattan, where she was waiting to tape "The Late Show With David Letterman."

"As it went through the review, there was less consensus on the science and conclusions on climate change," Ms. Whitman said. "So rather than go out with something half-baked or not put out the whole report, we felt it was important for us to get this out because there is a lot of really good information that people can use to measure our successes."

James L. Connaughton, chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality, a White House advisory group, said, "It would be utterly inaccurate to suggest that this administration has not provided quite an extensive discussion about the state of the climate. Ultimately, E.P.A. made the decision not to include the section on climate change because we had these ample discussions of the subject already."

But private environmental groups sharply criticized the changes when they heard of them.

"Political staff are becoming increasingly bold in forcing agency officials to endorse junk science," said Jeremy Symons, a climate policy expert at the National Wildlife Federation. "This is like the White House directing the secretary of labor to alter unemployment data to paint a rosy economic picture."

Drafts of the report have been circulating for months, but a heavy round of rewriting and cutting by White House officials in late April raised protest among E.P.A. officials working on the report.

An April 29 memorandum circulated among staff members said that after the changes by White House officials, the section on climate "no longer accurately represents scientific consensus on climate change."

Another memorandum circulated at the same time said that the easiest course would be to accept the White House revisions but that to do so would taint the agency, because "E.P.A. will take responsibility and severe criticism from the science and environmental communities for poorly representing the science."

The changes were mainly made by the Council on Environmental Quality, although the Office of Management and Budget was also involved, several E.P.A. officials said. It is the second time in a year that the White House has sought to play down global warming in official documents. Last September, an annual E.P.A. report on air pollution that for six years had contained a section on climate was released without one, and the decision to delete it was made by Bush administration appointees at the agency with White House approval.

Like the September report, the forthcoming report says the issues will be dealt with later by a climate research plan being prepared by the Bush administration.

Other sections of the coming E.P.A. report □* on water quality, ecological conditions, ozone depletion in the atmosphere and other issues □* all start with a summary statement about the potential impact of changes on human

health and the environment, which are the two responsibilities of the agency.

But in the "Global Issues" section of the draft returned by the White House to E.P.A. in April, an introductory sentence reading, "Climate change has global consequences for human health and the environment" was cut and replaced with a paragraph that starts: "The complexity of the Earth system and the interconnections among its components make it a scientific challenge to document change, diagnose its causes, and develop useful projections of how natural variability and human actions may affect the global environment in the future."

Some E.P.A. staff members defended the document, saying that although pared down it would still help policy makers and the agency address the climate issue.

"This is a positive step by the agency," said an author of the report, who did not want to be named, adding that it would help someone determine "if a facility or pollutant is going to hurt my family or make it bad for the birds, bees and fish out there."

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