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## Presidential Climate Action Project

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### Climate Action Brief: Restore Integrity of Federal Science

Sept. 9, 2008

At the same time that powerful tropical storms were hitting the Gulf of Mexico, Florida and the East Coast in recent weeks, a key scientific study was published in the journal [Nature](#). Its lead author, James B. Elsner, a geography professor at Florida State University, said his research suggests that climate change is heightening the impact of hurricanes.

While the behavior of moderate storms appeared unchanged, he said, the strongest among them had become stronger in the last 26 years. “I think we see a climate signal here,” he told the [New York Times](#) on September 3.

At about the same time, American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology published research that blames climate change for growing asthma and allergy problems – bad news for the 36 million Americans who suffer ragweed allergies. Dr. Richard W. Weber concludes in an [upcoming article](#) for the Academy that ragweed has longer seasons and more concentrated pollen counts because of climate change.

Like so many U.S. scientists who have studied and advanced theories about climate-change over the past decade, Elsner and Weber would do well to brace themselves for a storm of criticism from people who continue to deny that climate change is real.

But Elsner and Weber at least were able to publish their work intact. That hasn't been the case in recent years for many of the estimated 100,000 scientists and engineers who work for the federal government in the area of climate change. Their work has been subjected to politically motivated editing and censorship and to bureaucratic black holes.

The most famous of the government scientists has been Dr. James Hansen, the leading climate-change expert at NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies. He has reported repeated efforts by

government officials to silence him and blunt his message. Author and scientist Mark Bowen catalogued many of those efforts in his book, “Censoring Science: Inside the Political Attack on Dr. James Hansen and the Truth of Global Warming.”

But Hansen hasn’t been alone. A [survey of federal scientists](#) conducted by the Union of Concerned Scientists and the Government Accountability Project found that 46 percent respondents perceived or personally experienced pressure to eliminate the words "climate change," "global warming" or other similar terms from communications. Forty-three percent of respondents reported they had perceived or personally experienced edits during the review process that changed the meaning of their scientific findings. Other interference with federal science has been reported in topics as disparate as protection of endangered species and [public health](#).

Federal funds to study climate change have declined. In one exceptionally petty but revealing action, top officials at the NASA struck the words “understand and protect the home planet” from the agency’s mission statement.

Censoring and discrediting federal climate scientists will not make climate change disappear. On the contrary, what we don’t know will hurt us and leave us unprepared.

A critical job for the next President will be to restore the integrity of federal climate science and to end political interference in scientific work. The Presidential Climate Action Project calls on the next President to:

- Issue an executive order forbidding any public official from interfering with scientific research and reporting;
- Require agencies to restore free speech to federal scientists and give scientists the right of final review of the technical content of their reports;
- Appoint only the best qualified professionals – not special interest lobbyists -- for climate-critical positions in the administration;
- Rally the public as John F. Kennedy did during the space race to dedicate the nation to science and technology and to inspire young Americans to choose science as their careers.

While scientists always must be prepared to defend their findings and accept challenges to their conclusions, those who work on behalf of the American public should not have to fear political censorship and intimidation. After all, denial won’t make the hurricanes any weaker or bring down those pollen counts, it just undermines our ability to understand and prepare for them.

*This brief was prepared by the nonpartisan Presidential Climate Action Project at the University of Colorado Denver. PCAP, which is developing a 100-day climate action plan for the next President of the United States, issues briefs from time to time for the use of the presidential candidates as they consider policies to deal with climate change. Details are available at [www.climateactionproject.com](http://www.climateactionproject.com).*