

## Activist groups, USRTK have right to demand transparency from biotech scientists

The backlash against transparency is underway and is likely to inform how we interpret the scientific literature for years to come. In the past two decades, scientists, publishers, regulators, and journalists began to push research toward transparency, but that may be changing.

The Union of Concerned Scientists has long expressed dismay at the distortion of science. Yet within the past year, UCS has begun a campaign to blunt the tools with which the public can investigate claims of scientific malfeasance. Earlier this year, the organization released a report in which it decried using open-access requests to “bully” scientists. It cited several cases where scientists were harassed in the name of transparency.

But requests under FOIA for personal correspondence are crucial to transparency. Consider the case of Wei-Hock (Willie) Soon, a prominent denier of climate change. Soon’s emails revealed that he failed to disclose conflicts of interest in nearly a dozen papers. It’s the access to Soon’s mailboxes — not any official documentation of funding— that revealed this behavior.

The same mechanisms that watchdogs use to uncover scientific wrongdoing have been abused in the past. Climate scientist Michael Mann, for instance, was subject to invasive and harassing requests for information via freedom of information laws. Even so, transparency laws remain a fundamental tool for monitoring possible scientific misbehavior.

Nature recently reported that the University of Florida had provided them with emails that U.S. Right to Know had FOIA’d on one of their researchers. The story noted that the researcher received money from Monsanto to fund expenses incurred while giving educational talks on GMOs. It also noted that the scientist was provided with canned answers to respond to GMO critics, although it is unclear if he used them. The article doesn’t report on an email in which he advised Monsanto on ways to defeat a political campaign in California to require GMO labeling.

UCS maintains that FOIA requests for scientists funding remains fair game, but anything beyond this intrudes into academic freedom. It’s unclear how companies providing canned answers to scientists or scientists advising companies on political campaigns upholds the principles of academic freedom.

**The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post:** [The Fight Over Transparency: Round Two](#)