

Should there be limits on FOIA requests used to harass scientists?

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis.

Both the GMO and climate change debates involve the interests of corporations and have attracted political meddling. In both, scientists doing important work have had their personal correspondence exposed to public view and sometimes misrepresented.

Kevin Folta, a target of a recent FOIA request, doesn't think FOI laws should be limited. "Transparency ... helps to build trust," he told me. The danger, he says, lies in how records are used. "When you give someone who wants to destroy your career 4,600 pages of emails, they'll pick and choose to construct a false narrative."

The lessons from these episodes are clear: If you're doing research in a politicized field or that implicates big corporations, expect to receive demands for your private or professional correspondence.

Academia is struggling to identify the line between transparency and harassment. "...if you're a public employee, your professional dealings should be subject to public scrutiny," says Michael Eisen, a co-founder of the Public Library of Science. He says some public records requests "clearly are being used in an effort to harass and silence people, but it's hard to see how to limit public records acts that wouldn't cripple them."

"We have a responsibility to explain to the public what we do and why," Eisen says. "People are always going to take things out of context, ...our challenge is to explain it better." He says the targeting of Folta, "did a disservice to the cause of transparency.... He didn't break laws or violate university disclosure rules — is this really the guy we want to make the poster child" for nondisclosure?

Read full, original post: [GMO controversy: When do demands for scientists' records turn into harassment?](#)