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Fake Addendum by Contrarian Group Tries to Undo U.S. Government Climate Report

A soon-to-be-released Cato Institute report purports to be an "addendum" to a 2009 federal summary of climate change impacts but discounts the science in the original.

By Douglas Fischer and The Daily Climate | Monday, October 22, 2012 | 12 comments

A new "addendum" to be released as soon as this week purports to update with the latest science a 2009 federal assessment on the impacts to the United States of climate change.

The addendum matches the layout and design of the original, published by the U.S. Global Change Research Program: Cover art, "key message" sections, table of contents are all virtually identical, down to the chapter heads, fonts and footnotes.

But the new report comes from the conservative Washington, D.C.-based Cato Institute. And its findings – that science is questionable, the impacts negligible and the potential policy solutions ineffective – are more a rebuke than a revision of the original report and of accepted science both then and today.

"It's not an addendum. It's a counterfeit," said John Abraham, an associate professor at the University of Saint Thomas in Minnesota who studies clean power sources. "It's a continued effort to kick the can down the road: A steady drip, drip, drip of fake reports by false scientists to create a false sense of debate."

The 2009 assessment, titled *Global Change Impacts in the United States*, was presented to Congress as the federal government's best assessment of the science and potential impacts. It is part of an ongoing effort by the National Climatic Data Center to assess the state of climate change science.

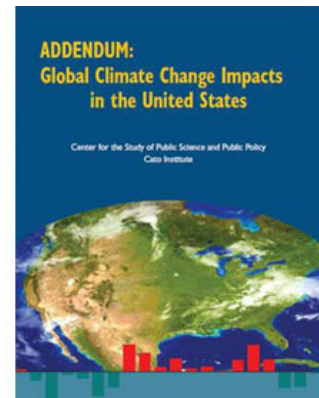
The Cato Institute bills its report as a "primary reference and a guidepost for those who want to bring science back into environmental protection." In the introduction to a review copy obtained by DailyClimate.org, Cato president Ed Crane wrote that the effort "grew out of the recognition that the original document was lacking in scope and relevant scientific detail."

The Cato report does its share of omitting, however, as well as selectively picking data and reviving long-discredited data and arguments.

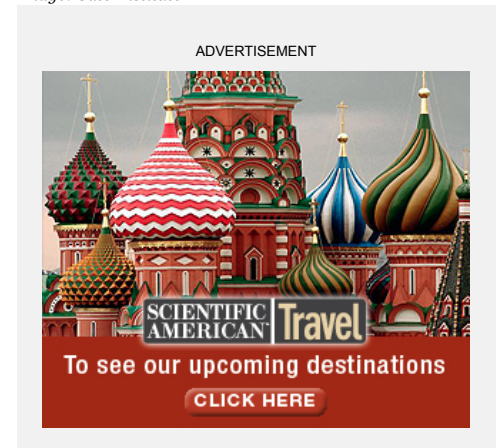
Smaller subset

The first example is on the cover: Both reports show a satellite image of the United States, with a bar-chart showing temperature changes running along the bottom. Yet the original 2009 report graphs the dramatic rise in global temperatures from 1900 through 2008, while the Cato report uses a much smaller subset – temperatures only from the United States, and just from 1991 through 2010 – to show a seemingly random pattern.

Other examples:



"It's not an addendum. It's a counterfeit." - John Abraham, University of Saint Thomas
Image: Cato Institute



- The 2009 report warned that widespread climate effects are occurring now and are expected to increase. Climate change, it concluded, will "stress water resources" and challenge crop and livestock production.

Cato's addendum counters that "observed impacts of climate change have little national significance." Climate change will simply "affect" water resources, while crop and livestock production, it says, can adapt to forecast change.

The science and evidence since 2009 supports the National Climate Center's assessment, however: Military brass are retooling operations and policies for a changed world, while this summer's drought will cost the U.S. economy an estimated \$70 billion to \$100 billion.

- Both reports dedicate a chapter to transportation. Both illustrate key points with a photograph of a big rig, shot low to the ground from the driver's side.

But while the federal report warns of disruptions and infrastructure damage, the Cato Institute concludes the nation can adapt. Again, evidence this summer supports the federal authors, with drought stranding barge traffic on the Mississippi River and an unprecedented downpour in Duluth, Minn., causing an estimated \$100 million in damage to roads and railways.

Omitted from the Cato "addendum," meanwhile, are two chapters in the 2009 report on Pacific and Caribbean islands and the coasts, as well as mention of hardships projected for Native Americans. Cato counters that information on coasts and islands are covered elsewhere in the book.

"It's like they took the simple part of what the U.S. is," said Michael MacCracken, chief scientist for climate change programs at the Climate Institute who helped review the 2009 report.

"If you hadn't seen the original report, you wouldn't know," he added. "They made it look really similar. Why would they do that unless they're trying to mislead?"

Selective science

Patrick Michaels, director of Cato's Center for the Study of Science and the report's editor-in-chief, said the point was to showcase the arbitrary and selective science used by the federal authors.

The 2009 report, Michaels said, is "a key document" buttressing the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's finding, in December 2009, that carbon dioxide endangers human health. By issuing a fake addendum – instead of an independent report – Cato can highlight the "highly selective nature of the science, and the political chicanery" that went into the original, he said.

"You could make the argument that they left out more than half of the science when they produced their report," Michaels said in a podcast. "We did this because we know that if anyone wants the EPA to back off, they have to turn around the endangerment finding. So this is the user's manual to reverse the endangerment finding."

Not the first

By law, every four years the federal government must assess the state of climate science and summarize it in a report for Congress. Draft text of the next version is expected in December, with the final version due to lawmakers at the end of 2013.

Cato is not the first group to mimic governmental reports and nomenclature.

In 1998 former National Academy of Sciences president Frederick Seitz received a rebuke from the academy for circulating a petition criticizing the science underlying the Kyoto treaty on carbon dioxide limits. The petition copied the format and style of a peer-reviewed article in the prestigious journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

More recently, in 2009 the Heartland Institute published a report from the Nongovernmental International Panel on Climate Change, or NIPCC – an 880-page critique of the United Nation's official Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or IPCC.

MacCracken, who headed up the first national assessment in 1995, wonders at the effort devoted to mimic and imitate instead of contribute to the official process. "They put more effort into this than they do in commenting on the reports when they're actually due," he said.

But Cato's Michaels says he tried: He was on his 45th single-spaced page of suggestions as the 2009 report's comment period was about to close. "And I had barely gotten into the document," he said.

Michaels ultimately filed a 170-page response, he said. "In a 60-day comment period, there's no way you can actually do it. It's designed that way."


"That's what generated this."The Cato Institute expects to release its report,

Addendum: Global Climate Change Impacts in the United States, as early as this week. A draft version can be downloaded from its website [pdf].

This article originally appeared at The Daily Climate, the climate change news source published by Environmental Health Sciences, a nonprofit media company.

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