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THE NATION

# White House Accused of Science Bias

■ The administration has censored and suppressed reports from U.S. agencies that don't adhere to a party line, the group alleges.

By Elizabeth Shogren, Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — More than 60 leading scientists, including a dozen Nobel laureates, on Wednesday accused the Bush administration of frequently suppressing or distorting scientific analysis from federal agencies when it disagrees with administration policies.

The research cited by the Union of Concerned Scientists covered a range of issues, from climate change to HIV/AIDS.

"When scientific knowledge has been found to be in conflict with its political goals, the administration has often manipulated the process through which science enters into its decisions," the scientists said in a statement.

The administration, they said, distorted science by putting people with conflicts of interest into official positions, censoring and suppressing reports by its own scientists and failing to seek independent advice.

"Other administrations have, on occasion, engaged in such practices, but not so systematically nor on so wide a front," the statement said. "Furthermore, in advocating policies that are not scientifically sound, the administration has sometimes misrepresented scientific knowledge and misled the public about the implications of its policies."

Along with the statement, the Union of Concerned Scientists released a report chronicling examples of what it termed the suppression or distortion of science under the Bush administration — including at the Agriculture Department, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

White House officials defended the administration's record on science and stressed that the examples cited were not representative.

"The sweeping conclusions of the [Union of Concerned Scientists'] statement go far beyond reasonable interpretations of the issues it

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recites," said John H. Marburger, director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. "This is a collection of disconnected cases that have rubbed somebody the wrong way."

One example he cited in the administration's defense was the research strategy it has crafted to study climate change and its impact.

A report published Wednesday by the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences applauded the strategy, and panelists said they had not perceived political influence affecting the administration's blueprint for studying the issue.

"This administration has strongly incorporated science in its policy-making processes and encourages sound, independent science," Marburger said.

But the Union of Concerned Scientists said that although politicians have long ignored science when making decisions, the Bush administration has repeatedly tried to adjust the science to fit its political objectives or to block the release of science that would contradict its policies.

"What we are seeing here, and we have not seen it before, is an administration that distorts the process by which it gets advice and censors the advice it gets from its own scientists," said Kurt Gottfried, emeritus professor of physics at Cornell University and chairman of the Union of Concerned Scientists.

For example, when claiming that Iraq had sought to acquire aluminum tubes for uranium enrichment centrifuges, thus providing evidence of a weapons program, the administration disregarded the contrary assessment by experts at the Livermore, Los Alamos and Oak Ridge national laboratories, the scientists said.

The report also shines a light on previously low-profile examples of alleged distortions. For instance, James Zahn, a research biologist at the Agriculture Department, said that, on at least 11 occasions, he was prohibited by his superiors from publicizing his research on the potential hazards to human health from airborne bacteria from farm wastes. Zahn left the department convinced that his work was being suppressed to protect agribusiness, the report stated.

The report also cited several examples of scientific information that it said had been altered or suppressed by officials at the CDC when the data seemed to be contrary to the president's positions or policies.

Information on the CDC's website was revised to raise doubts about the effectiveness of condoms in preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS, the report said. In another incident, information suggesting a link between breast cancer and abortion was posted on the website despite objections from the CDC's staff.

One stifled study was done by the EPA, documenting the percentage of children who were at risk of developmental problems because of the mercury-laden fish consumed by their mothers when they were in utero. That report, which said that 8% of women of childbearing age had mercury blood levels higher than what the government considered safe for a fetus, sat in a White House review for nine months. It made it to print when an EPA official leaked it to a reporter.

"In case after case, scientific input to policymaking is being censored and distorted," said Neal Lane, a former director of the National Science Foundation and a former presidential science advisor.

On the issue of climate change, the White House made so many alterations to the

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chapter on that topic in an EPA report last year that then-EPA Administrator Christie Whitman decided to publish the report in June without that section.

The episode sparked criticism from Russell Train, who served as EPA administrator under Presidents Nixon and Ford.

"[N]ever once, to my best recollection, did either the Nixon or Ford White House ever try to tell me how to make a decision," Train said in a letter to the New York Times.

The report also cites examples of the Bush administration filling scientific advisory panels with people tied to the industries being regulated. For instance, Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy G. Thompson rejected candidates from the CDC for an advisory panel on lead poisoning in children. At least two of the five people his office appointed had links with the lead industry, according to the report.

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