

# Union of Concerned Scientists

## Science for a Healthy Planet and Safer World

[en español](#)

### Climate Change Research Downplayed at the US Geological Survey



**What happened:** Researchers from the US Geological Survey (USGS) wrote a press release on a new climate change study; however, Trump administration officials delayed the press release for several months and then released a highly edited version that removed references to the study's main findings. The study's main findings were that flooding and rising sea levels will have a severe economic impact on California by the end of the century due to climate change.

**Why it matters:** The public has a right to know the main findings of a published scientific study and should not be deprived of vital scientific information by political officials because it may prove to be politically inconvenient.

According to three federal officials, the Trump administration delayed and then edited out the [references to climate change](#) in a press release on a peer-reviewed study conducted by US

Geological Survey (USGS) researchers, thereby preventing the public from accessing vital scientific information on how climate change could have a withering effect on California's economy over the next few decades. Instead of describing the major findings of the study, the press release focused on the study's methodologies and its "state-of-the-art computer models." The press release for the California study went through the office of James Reilly, the director of USGS. Reilly had previously ordered USGS scientists to use climate models that will likely end up [downplaying the impacts of climate change](#).

The study showed that by 2100, California could face over \$150 billion in property damage due to climate change and sea level rise. The study also found that 600,000 people could be affected by severe flooding by the end of the century, affecting three to seven times more people and businesses than previous estimates had suggested.

The sidelining of climate change science at the USGS appears to be a widespread practice among political appointees, at least in terms of publicizing or acknowledging the fact that climate change research is carried out at the agency. Several researchers at the USGS reported to [E&E News](#) that press releases on climate change related studies have taken an unusually long time to be reviewed and approved, as compared to prior administrations. Currently, it can take more than six months for political appointees to review them and the press releases are often altered in the process. "It's been made clear to us that we're not supposed to use climate change in press releases anymore. They will not be authorized," one federal researcher said to [E&E News](#), speaking anonymously for fear of reprisal.

This isn't the first time that the USGS under the Trump administration has declined to include climate change information from its [press releases](#). The phrase "climate change" does not appear in the USGS press release on a study looking at the detrimental effects of sea ice loss on polar bear populations or on another study looking at shifting farming regions due to climate change. One USGS study – on how a strategically important military institution could become inhabitable in less than twenty years because of climate change – failed to have a press release at all despite the study being ordered by the Department of Defense. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) is also exhibiting a similar pattern under the current administration, as [45 climate-related studies](#) conducted by agency scientists were not granted a press release.

USGS is "the [sole science agency](#) for the Department of the Interior" and the agency "serves the Nation by providing reliable scientific information" on a variety of natural science topics. However, by editing out climate change information on press releases – one of the major ways that the public learns about new government research – the USGS has failed to live up to its own mission statement. The public has the right to access scientific information that they have paid for, and it is important that the public has access to this research produced by federal scientists as climate change affects the health and safety of Americans everywhere. By restricting the public's access to this scientific information, officials have shown that they value political considerations over informing the public of the latest scientific information on climate change.

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