

The real global warming swindle

A Channel 4 documentary claimed that climate change was a conspiratorial lie. But an analysis of the evidence it used shows the film was riddled with distortions and errors

By Steve Connor

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A Channel 4 documentary that claimed global warming is a swindle was itself flawed with major errors which seriously undermine the programme's credibility, according to an investigation by *The Independent*.

The Great Global Warming Swindle, was based on graphs that were distorted, mislabelled or just plain wrong. The graphs were nevertheless used to attack the credibility and honesty of climate scientists.

A graph central to the programme's thesis, purporting to show variations in global temperatures over the past century, claimed to show that global warming was not linked with industrial emissions of carbon dioxide. Yet the graph was not what it seemed.

Other graphs used out-of-date information or data that was shown some years ago to be wrong. Yet the programme makers claimed the graphs demonstrated that orthodox climate science was a conspiratorial "lie" foisted on the public.

Channel 4 yesterday distanced itself from the programme, referring this newspaper's inquiries to a public relations consultant working on behalf of Wag TV, the production company behind the documentary.

Martin Durkin, who wrote and directed the film, admitted yesterday that one of the graphs contained serious errors but he said they were corrected in time for the second transmission of the programme following inquiries by *The Independent*.

Mr Durkin has already been criticised by one scientist who took part in the programme over alleged misrepresentation of his views on the climate.

The main arguments made in Mr Durkin's film were that climate change had little if anything to do with man-made carbon dioxide and that global warming can instead be linked directly with solar activity - sun spots.

One of the principal supports for his thesis came in the form of a graph labelled "World Temp - 120 years", which claimed to show rises and falls in average global temperatures between 1880 and 2000.

Mr Durkin's film argued that most global warming over the past century occurred between 1900 and 1940 and that there was a period of cooling between 1940 and 1975 when the post-war economic boom was under way. This showed, he said, that global warming had little to do with industrial emissions of carbon dioxide.

The programme-makers labelled the source of the world temperature data as "Nasa" but when we inquired about where we could find this information, we received an email through Wag TV's PR consultant saying that the graph was drawn from a 1998 diagram published in an obscure journal called Medical Sentinel. The authors of the paper are well-known climate sceptics who were funded by the Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine and the George C Marshall Institute, a right-wing Washington think-tank.

However, there are no diagrams in the paper that accurately compare with the C4 graph. The nearest comparison is a diagram of "terrestrial northern hemisphere" temperatures - which refers only to data gathered by weather stations in the top one third of the globe.

However, further inquiries revealed that the C4 graph was based on a diagram in another paper produced as part of a "petition project" by the same group of climate sceptics. This diagram was itself based on long out-of-date information on terrestrial temperatures compiled by Nasa scientists.

However, crucially, the axis along the bottom of the graph has been distorted in the C4 version of the graph, which made it look like the information was up-to-date when in fact the data ended in the early 1980s.

Mr Durkin admitted that his graphics team had extended the time axis along the bottom of the graph to the year 2000. "There was a fluff there," he said.

If Mr Durkin had gone directly to the Nasa website he could have got the most up-to-date data. This would have demonstrated that the amount of global warming since 1975, as monitored by terrestrial weather stations around the world, has been greater than that between 1900 and 1940 - although that would have undermined his argument.

"The original Nasa data was very wiggly-lined and we wanted the simplest line we could find," Mr Durkin said.

The programme failed to point out that scientists had now explained the period of "global cooling" between 1940 and 1970. It was caused by industrial emissions of sulphate pollutants, which tend to reflect sunlight. Subsequent clean-air laws have cleared up some of this pollution, revealing the true scale of global warming - a point that the film failed to mention.

Other graphs used in the film contained known errors, notably the graph of sunspot activity. Mr Durkin used data on solar cycle lengths which were first published in 1991 despite a corrected version being available - but again the corrected version would not have supported his argument. Mr Durkin also used a schematic graph of temperatures over the past 1,000 years that was at least 16 years old, which gave the impression that today's temperatures are cooler than during the medieval warm period. If he had used a more recent, and widely available, composite graph it would have shown average temperatures far exceed the past 1,000 years.

Climate change: An inconvenient truth... for C4

This expert in oceanography quoted in last week's debunking of the Gore green theory says he was 'seriously misrepresented'

By Geoffrey Lean, Environment Editor

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It was the television programme that set out to show that most of the world's climate scientists are misleading us when they say humanity is heating up the Earth by emitting carbon dioxide. And *The Great Global Warming Swindle*, screened by Channel 4 on Thursday night, convinced many viewers that it is indeed untrue that the gas is to blame for global warming.

But now the programme - and the channel - is facing a serious challenge to its own credibility after one of the most distinguished scientists that it featured said his views had been "grossly distorted" by the film, and made it clear that he believed human pollution did warm the climate.

Professor Carl Wunsch, professor of physical oceanography at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology said he had been "completely misrepresented" by the programme, and "totally misled" on its content. He added that he is considering making a formal complaint.

A Channel 4 spokesman said: "The film was a polemic that drew together the well-documented views of a number of respected scientists to reach the same conclusions. This is a controversial film but we feel that it is important that all sides of the debate are aired. If one of the contributors has concerns about his contribution we will look into that."

Any complaint would provoke a crisis at Channel 4, now recovering from the Jade Goody Big Brother storm. It had to make a rare public apology after the Independent Television Commission convicted previous programmes on environmental issues by the same film-maker, Martin Durkin, of similar offences - and is already facing questions on why it accepted another programme from him.

The commission found that the editing of interviews with four contributors to a series called *Against Nature* had "distorted or misrepresented their known views".

Professor Wunsch said: "I am angry because they completely misrepresented me. My views were distorted by the context in which they placed them. I was misled as to what it was going to be about. I was told about six months ago that this was to be a programme about how complicated it is to understand what is going on. If they had told me even the title of the programme, I would have absolutely refused to be on it. I am the one who has been swindled."

When told what the commission had found, he said: "That is what happened to me." He said he believes it is "an almost inescapable conclusion" that "if man adds excess CO₂ to the atmosphere, the climate will warm".

He went on: "The movie was terrible propaganda. It is characteristic of propaganda that you take an area where there is legitimate dispute and you claim straight out that people who disagree

with you are swindlers. That is what the film does in any area where some things are subject to argument."

Mr Durkin last night said that Professor Wunsch was "most certainly not duped into appearing into the programme" and that it "had not in any way misrepresented what he said".

Before the programme was shown, the *IoS* asked Channel 4 why it had commissioned another film from Mr Durkin and, further, whether it was making any special checks on its accuracy.

A spokesman said the programme made by Mr Durkin for which it had had to apologise was a decade old, adding: "We treat Martin as any other film-maker."

* David Cameron will tomorrow unveil three schemes to tax air travel in order to combat global warming. He is to consult on whether to impose VAT or fuel duty on domestic flights, institute a flight tax targeted at the most polluting engines, or to set up a "green miles scheme" to tax frequent flyers at a higher rate. The revenue raised would be used for tax cuts to help families.

The cold, hard facts about global warming

What do most scientists believe caused global warming?

The vast majority are convinced it is human emissions of carbon dioxide. It was established scientifically 180 years ago - and has never been seriously disputed - that natural levels of the gas given off by decaying vegetation and the oceans help to keep the Earth warm; without it, and other natural greenhouse gases, the planet would be some 20C colder and we would freeze. Adding even the so far relatively small amounts from human activities makes us warmer.

Has the world warmed before?

Yes, and big warmings over prehistoric times were not started by increasing CO₂ levels; changes in solar activity are more likely. Levels of the gas started rising some 800 years into the warming, but then probably reinforced it, making it bigger and longer. Temperature and CO₂ are interdependent; when one goes up the other follows. This time it is different because vast amounts of the gas are being artificially put into the atmosphere by humans.

What about more recent history?

There was a warm period in Europe in the Middle Ages, again probably caused by solar activity, but it does not seem to have been a worldwide phenomenon, although records are scanty.

So is the sun responsible now?

Some sceptics say so and probably it played the major role until quite recently. But over the past three decades, solar activity has scarcely risen, while temperatures have shot up - a fact disguised in the film. What has gone up is CO₂ and even top sceptic Nigel Lawson admits it is "highly likely" that the gas has "played a significant part" in global warming this century.