

USDA Scientists in Their Own Words

Excerpts from the USDA IG “Survey of USDA Scientists Regarding Scientific Integrity”

Our text analysis of the open-ended responses shows that scientists were concerned about broad censorship, poor efficiency of the publication process, and improperly-applied authorship (credit being given when not earned, or removal of authorship for inappropriate reasons).

“...a SIP [Scientific Integrity Policy] is kind of nicety with no real meaning.”

“It has done nothing about the lack of scientific integrity exhibited by my station director.”

“...seems like it is designed to protect the agency only not a code for individual scientist interacting with other scientists.”

“Yes and no. Some topics that are interpreted as highly controversial are closely monitored and any interaction with media for instance is either discouraged or highly scrutinized before being allowed to speak.”

“Nothing has really changed, because the SIP still provides managers with the ability to stop communication of anything they want. The wording has changed and sounds better, but reality has not changed.”

Based on comments provided in the survey, we note that respondents had concerns about reporting a scientific integrity incident because some felt that problems that came from management could not be reported to the same management. Others mention fear of retaliation, reprisal, and reprimand. Some of the quotes below illustrate these sentiments.

“I cannot afford to be fired.”

“I didn't want to get fired!!!”

“Tried to report to the same people who are responsible, which does not work.”

“To whom?”

“Nothing was done about it after I reported it...”

“I reported my situation and was subjected to extreme retaliation.”

“...more subtle tampering is common: with interpretations on politically sensitive topics, whether and how we address a certain research question, how we interpret our findings for the public are all interfered with on occasion...”

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