

E&E News Pollutes The Air Over The EPA's Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee

By ACSH Staff — February 17, 2020

A niche publication, E&E News, reports to a wide variety of institutional stakeholders on environmental and energy issues before Congress and federal regulatory agencies. Last week, in its report on the EPA's Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee, its editors felt it better to report half-truths.



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E&E's [report](#) [2] on the EPA's Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee (CASAC), sullied the reputation of one of ACSH's Board Members, Dr. James Enstrom, and a member of our Board of Scientific Advisors, Dr. Fred Lipfert. As they write:

On the EPA roster, Lipfert's areas of expertise are listed as 'air quality' and 'epidemiology.' But in a recent email exchange, he confirmed that his educational background, which includes a doctorate, is in engineering and environmental studies.

"I'm an amateur epidemiologist at best," Lipfert said, while noting that he has published 150 papers and reports on topics related to air pollution. "My position is that only simple statistics are required to understand the basic issues and that the

most pressing need is for more understanding of the basic science, not more manipulation of existing data."

But when you look at their source, it is not a roster, but a list of nominations, really more of a "cheat sheet," compressing the qualifications of 56 experts into a four-page table. Here is what the EPA itself reports:

Dr. Fred Lipfert is an independent consultant and former member of the scientific staff of Brookhaven National Laboratory in Upton, New York. He has degrees in mechanical engineering, aerospace engineering, fluid mechanics, and environmental studies. He has an extensive technical background in energy/environmental interactions with emphasis on air quality and related statistical analyses. During the past 47 years, he has published a book and over 160 scientific papers and reports on air pollution effects, source emissions characteristics, energy use topics, air pollutant dispersion and modeling, and air quality characterization. His consulting activities have included expert testimony, risk assessment issues, research on atmospheric damage to materials, health effects of mercury, long- and short-term health effects of toxic and criteria air pollutants. Clients have included Federal and State agencies in the U.S. and Canada and various industrial and trade organizations. He was part of a National Research Council committee that reviewed the research program of the U.S. Department of Energy on fine particulate matter and the National Acid Precipitation Assessment Program. He has testified before the U.S. Congress on energy issues. For the past 5 years he has continued to work on his own behalf without external support.

He is, by any criteria, an expert in the effects of air pollution and in the assessment of air pollution scientific papers. Dr. Lipfert wrote to Erica Martinson, E&E's editor for this newsletter because they had "disparaged" his qualifications to serve as an expert. While they decline to publish his letter or to modify their article, Ms. Martinson wrote:

"Sean's story quoted you accurately. He also wrote that you have a doctorate and that your educational background is in engineering and environmental studies. There is no disputing your significant accomplishments in those areas. ...Scientific research is extraordinarily specialized, and that includes epidemiology. Per Sean: It is noteworthy that CASAC has no epidemiologists among its members, and the fact that the one member of the S.M.E. consultant pool offering advice in that capacity does not have academic credentials in that area is also noteworthy."

Let us take a moment to clarify the facts. The reality is that Dr. Lipfert is an expert in air pollution studies and that is why he serves as one of the "Non-member Consultants to Assist CASAC PM and Ozone Reviews," not on the CASAC committee itself. And while the E&E article was directed at the consultant pool, that distinction was never made in the article. Dr. Lipfert's candid comments were used by the E&E reporter as a strawman, to argue that the CASAC lacks epidemiologic experts. But E&E is factually incorrect in characterizing the consultant pool as having only one epidemiologist among its members. They forgot to mention, Duncan Thomas, described by the EPA as:

"...Professor of Biostatistics in the Department of Preventive Medicine, and Verna R. Richter Chair in Cancer Research at the University of Southern California Keck School of Medicine. He received his Ph.D. from McGill University in 1976, where he continued as a faculty member until his recruitment to U.S.C. in 1984. There he served as the Head of the Biostatistics Division until 2013 and co-directed the Southern California Environmental Health Sciences Center and the Cancer Epidemiology Program in the U.S.C./Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center. His primary research interest has been in the development of statistical methods for environmental and genetic epidemiology, with numerous collaborations in both areas."

Sounds like a qualified epidemiologist to me.

Dr. James Enstrom, in addition to being on our board of trustees, is a member of our Board of Scientific advisors. He is both an expert in the field of air pollution, and has an "M.P.H. in epidemiology and a Postdoctoral Certificate in cancer epidemiology under the direction of renowned UCLA School of Public Health Dean Lester Breslow." His crime according to E&E,

"Enstrom asserted there is no proven tie between soot exposure and premature death, even as other researchers conclude the perils are greater than once thought."

Yes, he dared to disagree with other experts. But isn't that the role of a panel, to bring diverse viewpoints forward so they can be weighed and taken into account when developing policy? Similarly, Dr. Lipfert's most grievous sin was writing that "Accountability was not established ... when asked whether a pivotal EPA analysis was scientifically sound."

The article exposes one last bit of hypocrisy on the part of E&E. As Mr. Reilly writes in describing CASAC consultants, "...others have the backing of farm and business lobbies that have opposed stricter air pollution limits." But a look at E&E's "About us" page shows you that they proudly mention energy companies, corporations, and law firms among their subscribers. Consultation and policy development requires diverse opinions in a healthy exchange of ideas. E&E is happy to tell those corporations, energy concerns, and law firm subscribers, their views, but less interested in hearing their responses. That is a monologue, not a dialogue, and does little to further the search for scientific truths that are at the heart of governmental regulation.

The research activities of Drs. Enstrom and Lipfert are independent of their relationships to the ACSH, and we are proud of these citizen-scientists who have donated their time and expertise to further understanding of air pollution and its effects. It is equally true for both left and right in American politics that we are all better off without ad hominem attacks on individuals who do not share your views. E&E has printed opinions based on half-reported facts; they are not serving their subscribers or the policy debate well.

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