DeSmogBlog, The Intercept, Spread Lies About ACSH, COVID-19

By ACSH Staff — March 17, 2020

"Journalists" Sharon Kelly of DeSmogBlog and Lee Fang of The Intercept are spreading disinformation about ACSH and COVID-19.

Polluting the internet

By Alex Berezow, PhD, Josh Bloom, PhD, Chuck Dinerstein, MD, MBA, and Thom Golab

ACSH is being targeted in a purposeful disinformation campaign by two very sketchy yet influential websites.

The first, DeSmogBlog, has a long history of smearing reputable scientists with whom it disagrees on climate change. The second, The Intercept, is edited by Glenn Greenwald, a "journalist" who once collaborated with WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who is facing extradition charges to the U.S. for espionage. A Wall Street Journal op-ed [1] accused Mr. Greenwald of being an accomplice to treason, and recently, he was charged with committing cybercrimes in Brazil [2].

Lovely people, some of whom may be spending time in prison soon. So, what do they have against ACSH?

DeSmogBlog Lies about ACSH and COVID-19

Here's what Sharon Kelly wrote at DeSmogBlog about us:
Meet the Climate Science Deniers Who Downplayed COVID-19 Risks

By Sharon Kelly • Monday, March 16, 2020 - 15:25

Huh?! Climate science deniers? We don't discuss climate change to any meaningful extent. It's not one of our topics. On the very few occasions the topic has come up, it is only in passing and usually related to infectious disease, energy policy, or debunking apocalypse-mongering. And downplaying the COVID-19 threat? We are literally one of the "best sources" on COVID-19 analysis, according to RealClearScience [3]. (That's also why we've been cited in the Wall Street Journal, Yahoo News, Business Insider, and myriad other sources [4].)

Thus, that DeSmogBlog headline, which has merely 9 words in it, told two lies. That's an impressive word-to-lie ratio. The article, written by a lawyer (of course [5]), is even worse. It cherry-picks quotes out of context from microbiologist Dr. Alex Berezow. For instance:

On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that the outbreak of novel coronavirus 2019, which causes the disease COVID-19, was officially a “public health emergency of international concern.” At the time, there were cases confirmed in 19 countries and deaths in China had reached 170.

The very next day, the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH) published an article titled, “Coronavirus in the U.S.: How Bad Will It Be?”

ACSH is one of several organizations promoting climate science denial that are now spreading misinformation on the coronavirus, with potentially deadly consequences.

The truth: Dr. Berezow scolded the World Health Organization for dragging its feet on COVID-19. A week before the WHO issued its declaration, Dr. Berezow wrote [6]: "[I]t is rather a slam-dunk case that we are facing a global public health crisis."

Ms. Kelly flat-out lied. And she keeps lying:

"When it comes to coronavirus, now a global pandemic, ACSH's authors rushed to
Dr. Berezow never wrote anything like that. Literally, his first article on the topic was the aforementioned piece criticizing the WHO for its "major screw-up" in not declaring a global health crisis earlier.

Dr. Berezow did believe that COVID-19 posed little threat to the United States. This was based on the behavior of previous coronaviruses, SARS and MERS. Like many scientists, Dr. Berezow assumed COVID-19 might follow a similar path. However, when the data changed, Dr. Berezow changed his mind [7]. That's what scientists do. On February 27, when the U.S. had confirmed 60 cases of COVID-19, Dr. Berezow wrote: "Whatever hope we once had of containing the virus to China or southeast Asia is long gone."

So, how does DeSmogBlog conclude that Dr. Berezow and ACSH "downplayed" the COVID-19 threat? Because we correctly point out that influenza is still a far bigger public health threat. Ms. Kelly wrote:

> The author of the ACSH piece claiming that coronavirus is “not even close” to as bad as the flu was Dr. Alex Berezow — a PhD in microbiology, according to his bio, not a medical doctor.

Correct on all counts. Unlike Ms. Kelly, Dr. Berezow is an actual expert. Microbiologists, not medical doctors, are experts in infectious disease. Also unlike Ms. Kelly, Dr. Berezow is aware that influenza infects about one billion people each year and kills 300,000 to 500,000. By comparison, COVID-19 has infected 200,000 and killed 7,500. At this point in time, it is an objective fact that the flu is a bigger threat, even if a lawyer disagrees.

**The Intercept Lies About ACSH and COVID-19**

Unsurprisingly, the social media echo chamber picked up the article. Lee Fang, who works for The Intercept and was once caught falsely accusing the U.S. Chamber of Commerce [8] of committing a crime, tweeted:
In other words, Mr. Fang simply repeated the lies fed to him by a lawyer writing for a blog. All in the day's work of an "investigative journalist," apparently.

**Be Careful What You Read**

Unfortunately, a substantial portion of the American and international media is purposefully deceitful. Be careful what you read.