

# Science abandoned, **scientists** muzzled

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*POSTMEDIA NEWS*

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OTTAWA — The federal government “really doesn’t grasp what science is about” and could be unable to respond to adverse environmental changes because it has abandoned research into climate change and water pollution, say **scientists** interviewed for CBC’s *The Fifth Estate*.

“What we have done in Canada is turned off the radar. We are flying along in an airplane and we put curtains over the windshield of those pilots of that flight crew and we’ve turned off the instruments,”

we've turned off the instruments," former government **scientist** Peter Ross says in the episode Silence of the Labs, which airs Friday night.

"We don't know what is coming tomorrow, let alone next year, in terms of some of these potentially catastrophic incidents."

The **scientists** said Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government has cut funding of pure science and is instead spending on projects that benefit industry and commerce.

Meanwhile, **scientists** are being restricted from talking to media and all messaging goes through "a spin machine."

After years of not being allowed to talk to media, Ross's department was terminated last spring because its work was deemed no longer important.

"My ability to convey important findings to the general public, to the electorate, to the taxpayer, had been severely curtailed," said Ross, a marine mammal toxicologist who once gave frequent media interviews about contamination in Canadian waters, wildlife and among northern people.

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In 2008, Postmedia News — then Canwest News Service — obtained internal government documents that outlined how Environment Canada was muzzling its **scientists** by requiring all media inquiries be sent to Ottawa, where communications specialists would help **scien-**tists develop approved messages.

“Just as we have ‘one department, one website’ we should have ‘one department, one voice,’” an Environment Canada PowerPoint presentation reads.

Postmedia News has uncovered other examples of **scientists** being **silenced**.

Documents obtained under access-to-information law showed that fisheries **scientist** Kristi Miller was forbidden to speak to media in January 2011 after she published a landmark study about the decline in farmed salmon in the Fraser River. Similarly, ozone **scientist** David Tarasick was not given approval to talk to reporters about a study he published on an Arctic ozone hole in the fall of 2011.

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Additionally, an Ottawa Citizen investigation in spring 2012 showed U.S. government contributors to a study on snowfall pattern were happy to speak to reporters, while Canadian government **sci-**entists working on the same study could not talk. Instead, 11 government employees spent a day emailing back and forth to agree on "approved" lines that did not directly address the paper's questions.

"They're feeding the public a bunch of hogwash and I think most people would accept that you can't run a democracy and make it function on a public informed with B.S.," former government **scientist** David Schindler told the CBC.

Information commissioner Suzanne Legault confirmed in the spring she is investigating whether the government is breaching access-to-information law by restricting what its **scientists** can say.