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## Federal scientists closely monitored during polar conference

### Environment Canada media relations staff oversee interviews

CBC News Posted: Apr 24, 2012 6:39 PM ET | Last Updated: Apr 24, 2012 10:00 PM ET 77



Federal science 'spinnners' 2:12



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Media liaison staffers have been sent to an international polar conference in Montreal to shadow Canadian government scientists during interviews, in what critics are calling the latest example of extreme information control by the Harper Conservatives.

Hundreds of researchers from around the globe arrived in Montreal this week to attend the International Polar Year Conference, but those scientists working for Environment Canada were also accompanied by so-called "media relations contacts" tasked with monitoring and recording interactions with the press.

Ahead of the conference, the Canadian participants were reportedly sent a memo ordering them to have a government liaison present during conversations with reporters.

While none of the government scientists would speak on record about their media monitors, one researcher told CBC's Dan Halton off-camera that the strict communications measures were an embarrassment to Canada.

Some leading researchers worry the media intervention may undermine Canada's scientific reputation abroad.

Climatologist Andrew Weaver, with the University of Victoria, called the tactics excessive.

"The current administration probably has a fear about science," said Weaver, who compared the monitoring of scientists to something out of the Soviet era.

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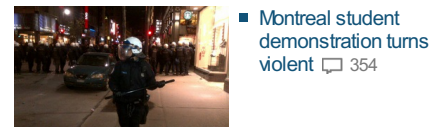
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## Science and media groups call for freer relationship

Concerns about the perceived "muzzling" of some of Canada's brightest scientific minds have been aired for some time.

In an open letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper posted last February, groups representing scientists and journalists appealed for an end to "government muzzling of publicly funded scientists."

The groups noted that last fall Environment Canada had prevented David Tarasick from speaking about his ozone layer research, which had been published in the journal Nature, and that earlier the Privy Council Office had stopped Kristina Miller, a researcher at Fisheries and Oceans, from granting interviews about her work on sockeye salmon decline in B.C., findings previously published in the journal Science.

In February, at the annual meeting of the American Association of the Advancement of Science in Vancouver, delegates appealed for a more open relationship between journalists and government scientists.

The government has said its scientists are not muzzled and that journalists do have timely access to researchers.

But at the Vancouver conference, Kathryn O'Hara, a Carleton University journalism professor, noted at the time that Gary Goodyear, the minister of state for science and technology, didn't respond to a request to participate in the conference discussion, and that all other federal government officials invited to participate said they were not available.

With files from the CBC's Dan Halton

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- International Polar Year Conference

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### Bob McDonald's Blog



#### The space shuttles belong in a museum, it's time for a fresh look at space

Apr. 20, 2012 2:49 PM

The shuttles were a grand experiment, some would say a failed experiment; now it's time to place them in the history books where they belong and get on with more efficient and farther-reaching ventures into the unknown.

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Apr. 25, 2012 1:46 PM

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#### pellyrat

2012/04/26 at 7:48 AM ET

Rating

2

2



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"Media liaison officers" is a fancy spin doctor way of saying Harper's thugs and goons. This is sick and a bit scary. Giving Harper a majority seems to be the go ahead for the rise of the 4th Reich. Hopefully Canadians at large and MPs in parliament are smart and courageous enough not to let that happen. Harper is too power hungry and is bordering on meglomania. Like it not or not Mr. Harper, Science Happens and if you ignore it, it happens better and faster and could catch you with your pants down.....and if it does you'll be taking all of us with you.

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#### Robert-Mac

2012/04/26 at 6:37 AM ET

Rating

8

8



0



The government appoints all the CBC directors. It's just a matter of time until the CBC, through a combination of the board members and cutting budgets will be pulled into line like Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans and Natural Resources Canada.

Let's celebrate an independent and vibrant CBC, because, sadly, we probably won't have it for much longer.

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#### nilaps

2012/04/26 at 6:33 AM ET

Rating

Fear of the unknown is what is driving the Government to muzzle the scientist. The Harper government has a history of not understanding even the simple basis of science.

6

6 0

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**Different POV**

2012/04/26 at 6:09 AM ET

Rating: 9

9 0

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The CPC gov't are cowards pure and simple. All cowards are afraid of the truth or any statement that is at variance with their view of the world.

Welcome to North Korea, Communist China or Russia formerly known as Canada.

**bronson**

2012/04/26 at 5:16 AM ET

Rating: 15

15 0

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"Media liaison staffers "- the reds called them "political officers"."



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