

PAO POINT PAPER
12/15/2005

SUBJECT: NASA Announcing 2005 is tied for Warmest Year on Record

BACKGROUND: The Goddard Institute of Space Studies (GISS) last night released to ABC News a letter to the editor (written by GISS director Dr. James Hansen) containing data indicating that 2005 ties 1998 as the warmest year on record. Hansen also gave ABC News reporter Bill Blakemore a brief interview on this topic (neither the letter to the editor nor the interview was coordinated with Headquarters or approved). Because GISS deals with global climate issues, it annually releases approved information (in press release and Web feature format) about the year's average temperatures – information that generates a lot of media interest. This data and the corresponding release/feature are to be coordinated with Headquarters PAOs. The release of this year's information, however, was not properly coordinated with Headquarters and was disseminated without our knowledge or approval.

KEY FACTS:

- NASA has not officially released any data declaring 2005 tied with 1998 for the warmest year on record, only Dr. Hansen has.
- Dr. Hansen acted independently of Headquarters and approved PAO channels when he spoke with ABC News and gave them his letter to the editor.
- In past discussions with GISS PAO Leslie Nolan-McCarthy, she has sent Headquarters mixed signals as to if/when this data would be released. Headquarters was unaware Hansen would be releasing this data when he did.

HISTORY/TIMELINE OF EVENTS:

- Goddard Space Flight Center (GSFC) contacted Headquarters SMD PAOs yesterday (12/14) about two media queries, one from the L.A. Times and the other from ABC News, both of which dealt with the question "Is 2005 the warmest year on record?". Because this topic falls in GISS's domain, these media requests should have come from GISS PAO and not GSFC. However, GISS PAO could not be reached all afternoon yesterday, so GSFC worked these requests through Headquarters. The inability to reach GISS on this issue severely hampered the flow of information and made it difficult to address these queries properly.
- Headquarters PAOs contacted GSFC and made several attempts to contact GISS PAO about these questions. GSFC informed Headquarters that they could not confirm any "warmest year on record" data being released by GISS, but since GISS frequently operates outside of PAO communications channels, such data "may" appear on the GISS Web page, and if so it would likely be a reprint of World Meteorological Organization data. This was discussed in an afternoon phone call with

GSFC's Ed Champion, who also forwarded Headquarters an e-mail from GISS PAO declaring there would be "no release" and saying Headquarters was making "much ado about little."

- No one from either GISS or GSFC could definitively confirm whether this information would be posted, and the likelihood of seeing any such announcement was continually downplayed by GSFC. Again, GISS PAO could not be reached on this topic yesterday after several attempts. GISS PAO had previously told Headquarters that they planned "no announcement" on this issue. However, Headquarters and GSFC/GISS had discussed that a routine data release on 2005 temperatures was forthcoming. No such release had yet been approved by Headquarters.
- Headquarters PAOs granted the L.A. Times an interview with GSFC scientist Dr. Waleed Abdalati yesterday evening, and during the course of this interview Dr. Abdalati could not confirm 2005 as being the warmest year on record. Again, no one from GSFC/GISS has yet been able to confirm any data showing 2005 as being the warmest year on record.
- Headquarters PAOs responded to the ABC News query by informing them that NASA has released no data yet confirming 2005 as the warmest recorded year. ABC News wanted something to run on their *Good Morning America* program, and they hinted that they were in talks with Dr. Hansen on this matter. Neither Hansen nor GISS PAO nor GSFC confirmed with Headquarters the release of any such data.
- At this point, Headquarters understood both of these media queries to be taken care of, and having not heard back from GISS PAO on the topic, assumed that the aforementioned data would not be released on 12/15.
- This morning, Headquarters learned that someone at GISS had indeed released said data. Dr. Hansen released the data in the form of a letter to the editor he planned to submit to the journal *Science*. His letter was signed off on by fellow Columbia scientists. The release of this data had not been coordinated properly with Headquarters and undermined the protocol, chain of command and flow of information channels in place.
- Headquarters PAOs conducted a telecon this morning with GSFC/GISS. It was initially thought by Headquarters, GSFC and GISS that the information had been posted to the GISS Web site. However, after GISS PAO discussed the chain of events with Dr. Hansen, she said that, according to Hansen, the information and a corresponding interview were only given to ABC News. Furthermore, GISS currently has the information ready to post on its Web site, but they have been told by Headquarters to not yet do so until the required approval is granted.
- It bears mentioning that Dr. Hansen and GISS as a whole do not always follow Headquarters protocol and sometimes fail to give Headquarters adequate notice when they plan to release information to the public. This is not the first time Headquarters has had this problem with GISS.

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