

Duke University admitted Sunday that it used manipulated and completely fabricated data about respiratory illnesses to obtain grants from the Environmental Protection Agency, among other agencies.

Internal investigators at the school believe that former lab technician Erin Potts-Kant falsified or fabricated data for medical research reports, attorneys for Duke said in response to a federal whistleblower lawsuit against the school. Potts-Kant told investigators that she faked data that wound up being “included in various publications and grant applications.”

DAILY CALLER (ITEM #2)

Former analyst Joseph Thomas alleged in a recent lawsuit that the university ignored warning signs about Potts-Kant’s work and tried to cover up the fraud, but the university denies there were warning signs. The lawsuit contends that all the work Potts-Kant did in her eight years at Duke was fabricated, and that the bogus data was done through grants worth \$112.8 million to Duke and \$120.9 million to other universities in North Carolina.

Investigators reviewed 36 research reports and found that, in many cases, she simply made things up.

Potts-Kant admitted that she “generated experiment data that was altered” and “knew the altered experiment data was false,” according to information offered on her behalf by North Carolina lawyer Amos Tyndall.

She worked in the laboratory of academic Michael Foster, who received a grant from the EPA in 2007 to determine whether exposure to airborne particulates can impair lung development in newborn mice. Potts-Kant used a machine helping researchers gauge the lung function of mice to gain insight on human respiratory ailments like asthma.

The project was part of a \$7.7 million environmental justice grant from the EPA. The allegations could throw a wrench in data sets that the EPA uses to show the relationship between particulate and respiratory illnesses.

The EPA has not responded to The Daily Caller News Foundation's request for comment about the fraudulent data and weather that might affect years of research. The agency has argued for decades that there is a causal relationship between air pollution levels and deaths and illnesses.

Federal regulators estimate that Clean Air Act regulations will deliver \$2 trillion in public health benefits by 2030, exceeding the cost of federal clean air regulations by a ratio of 30-to-1 at the high end. The benefits, according to the EPA, come from reducing fine particulate matter and ground-level ozone, which EPA says cause premature death.

Recent research, however, shows the causal relationship is a lot less direct than initially believed. Veteran statistician Stan Young published a study in June which found "little evidence for association between air quality and acute deaths" in California between 2000 and 2012.

"The daily death variability was mostly explained by time of year or weather variables; Neither PM2.5 nor ozone added appreciably to the prediction of daily deaths," notes Young's study, which was peer-reviewed and published in the journal *Regulatory Toxicology and Pharmacology* June 18.

Young tried to get his research published in the journal *PLOS One* in July 2015, but the publication rejected the paper, pointing to the EPA's research showing the relationship between air pollution and respiratory illness.

Officials inside the Trump administration say they are working on ways to develop more rigorous review techniques for evaluating climate research.

EPA administrator Scott Pruitt, for instance, will put in place a "red team, blue team" exercise as part of an "at-length evaluation of U.S. climate science," according to a senior administration official. The administration is expected to appoint experts to serve on each team.

"We are in fact very excited about this initiative," said to the official, who commented anonymously. "Climate science, like other fields of science, is constantly changing. A new, fresh and transparent evaluation is something everyone should support doing."

The U.S. government uses similar exercises to expose any vulnerabilities to military tactics. Skeptics say it would give needed balance to climate science.

Follow Chris White on Facebook and Twitter