

Sources: White House cut testimony

Story Highlights

- Testimony "was eviscerated," says CDC official familiar with both versions
- OMB, which reviews congressional testimony, had no comment
- CDC spokesman sought to play down White House changes
- Deleted: Details on how many people would be affected by warming

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WASHINGTON (AP) -- The White House severely edited congressional testimony given Tuesday by the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on the impact of climate change on health, removing specific scientific references to potential health risks, according to two sources familiar with the documents.

Dr. Julie Gerberding, director of the Atlanta-based CDC, the government's premier disease monitoring agency, told a Senate hearing that climate change "is anticipated to have a broad range of impacts on the health of Americans."



CDC Director Julie Gerberding testifies Tuesday on Capitol Hill in Washington.

But her prepared testimony was devoted entirely to the CDC's preparation, with few details on what effects climate change could have on the spread of disease. Only during questioning did she describe some specific diseases that likely would be affected, again without elaboration.

Her testimony before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee had much less information on health risks than a much longer draft version Gerberding submitted to the White House Office of Management and Budget for review in advance of her appearance.

"It was eviscerated," said a CDC official, familiar with both versions, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the review process.

The official said that while it is customary for testimony to be changed in a White House review, these changes were particularly "heavy-handed," with the document cut from its original 14 pages to four. It was six pages as presented to the Senate committee.

The OMB had no comment on Gerberding's testimony.

"We generally don't speculate and comment on anything until it is the final product," said OMB

spokesman Sean Kevelighan. He added that OMB reviews take into consideration "whether they ... line up well with the national priorities of the administration."

The CDC is part of the Department of Health and Human Services and its congressional testimony, as is normal with all agencies, is routinely reviewed by OMB.

But Gerberding, who could not be reached late Tuesday for comment, was said to have been surprised by the extensive changes. Copies of the original testimony already had been sent to a number of associated health groups representing states, county and city health agencies that the CDC routinely coordinates with, a CDC official said.

CDC spokesman Tom Skinner sought to play down the White House changes. He called Gerberding's appearance before the Senate panel "very productive" and said she addressed the issues she wanted during her remarks and when questioned by the senators.

"What needed to be said as far we're concerned was said," said Skinner in a telephone interview from Atlanta. "She certainly communicated with the committee everything she felt was critical to help them appreciate and understand all the issues surrounding climate change and its potential impact on public health."

The deletions directed by the White House included details on how many people might be adversely affected because of increased warming, according to one official who has seen the original version. Also deleted were the scientific basis for some of the CDC's analysis on what kinds of diseases might be spread in a warmer climate and rising sea level, the official added. Gerberding seems to have tried to address some of those issues during questioning from senators.

Sen. Barbara Boxer, a California Democrat and the committee's chairman, produced a CDC chart listing the broad range of health problems that could emerge from a significant temperature increase and sea level rise

They include fatalities from heat stress and heart failure, increased injuries and deaths from severe weather such as hurricanes; more respiratory problems from drought-driven air pollution; an increase in waterborne diseases including cholera, and increases in vector-borne diseases including malaria and hantavirus; and mental health problems such as depression and post-traumatic stress.

"These are the potential things you can expect," replied Gerberding when asked about the items listed. "... In some of these areas its not a question of if. It's a question of who, what, how and when."

Peter Rafle, a spokesman for Boxer, said the senator knew nothing about changes that might have been made to Gerberding's testimony by the White House.