

## OZONE

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Despite the name, the "ozone hole" is simply a lessening of ozone molecules above the Arctic and Antarctic after those regions' seasons of extended darkness end. Within three to four weeks, the ozone level returns to normal.

Rasmussen said that in the late 1970's the phenomenon was discovered over the Antarctic. For the next six to seven years, the phenomenon was called the "ozone minimum." But with the perpetual need for research funds the "ozone minimum" became the "ozone hole."

By making the phenomenon sound more threatening, scientists got more funds to study it, Rasmussen said.

Later, NASA said a high-altitude flight had found the destruction of the ozone layer was occurring three times faster than previously thought.

That conclusion was based on one flight that had been done out of 24, said Brian Dunbar, a NASA spokesman. The flight they had mentioned, Dunbar said, happened to be the one that measured the highest level of ozone depletion.

In fact, NASA will not release the findings of the other 23 flights until after March 27.

The Wall Street Journal reported — almost three weeks

after NASA made the Feb. 3 announcement — that NASA was now getting readings that showed the ozone level was back to previously forecasted levels, which is consistent with Paul Engelking, a University chemistry professor, who said the level fluctuates hourly.

Rasmussen said the NASA statements aren't good science.

"They seem to be pretty biased in showing only the worst-case data," he said. "We're trying to find an overall pattern. In any science you have to look at repeatedly recurrent phenomena before making a conclusion."

But Engelking said he still believes the ban on CFCs is a good idea. CFCs are chemicals used as coolants primarily in automobile air conditioners and in refrigerators.

CFCs are drawn into the upper atmosphere, where the molecules break apart and the chlorine atoms then go on to attack ozone molecules, Engelking said.

Despite the CFC ban, Engelking said he is still cautious, as there are still many chemicals on international and national markets that can damage the ozone layer. The most numerous of these chemicals is

"By 2020, we will have only doubled the amount of ozone damaging chemicals in the stratosphere instead of tripled or quadrupled," he said.

Engelking said more reliable NASA studies have found a global ozone thinning of 3 percent from 1979 to 1990.

However, Engelking said 2020 will see a 30 percent disappearance of ozone protection in the northern and southern latitudes. In addition, Engelking said, we will see a nearly 100 percent reduction in ozone levels above the Arctic and Antarctic.

Engelking likened the difference in those ozone levels to the difference between a suntan and a sunburn. He said the amount of UV radiation one gets directly affects that person's chances of developing skin cancer. Other harmful effects could include increased numbers of eye cataracts and a weakening of the body's immune system.

But the real problem, Engelking said, is that no one is sure what effects increased levels of UV radiation will have on the environment.

While scientists debate the severity or existence of the ozone "hole," the cost to consumers and industry mounts.

Cathy Andriadis, a spokeswoman for the Du Pont company, said \$135 billion worth of equipment in the United States is dependent on CFCs for their operation. She said Du Pont, formerly one of the largest producers of CFCs, was spending more than \$1 billion to find alternatives to the chemicals.

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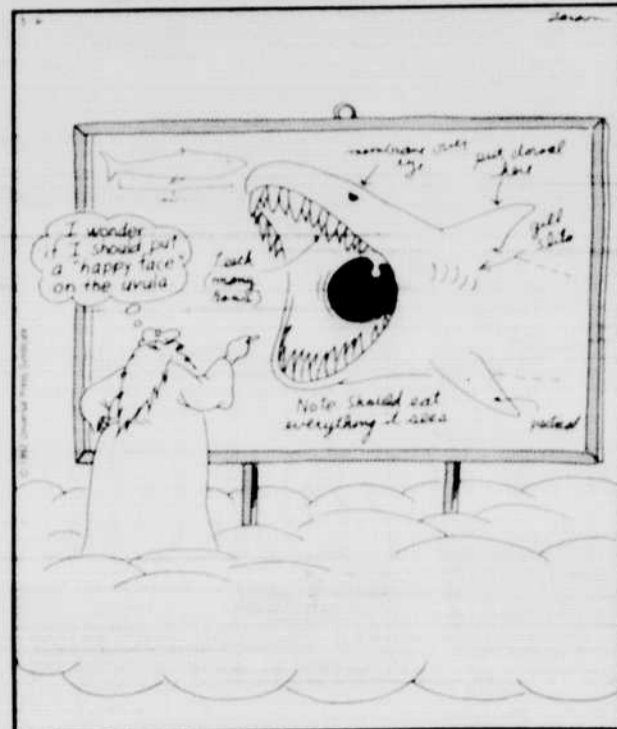
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