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Atlantis shuttle monitors sun for atmosphere damage clues



warming.

The only way to understand humans' impact on the atmosphere is to track the subtle, naturally occurring changes in solar energy, said NASA scientist Ernest Hilsenrath, who's in charge of an ozone monitor flying on Atlantis.

Hilsenrath stressed that it's a tedious process with little fanfare.

"There aren't any real discoveries," he said. "We haven't learned anything new about the sun. The sun is not going out. We haven't found anything new about the Antarctic ozone hole."

"What we're doing now is providing a baseline for measurements for the future. ... I call it a legacy for environmental investigators in the next century."

Future scientists will be able to compare these measurements of visible, ultraviolet and infrared light with their own to see how Earth's atmosphere and climate have changed over the decades, Hilsenrath said.

For now, Hilsenrath and other scientists are

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — For the third time in nearly a week, Atlantis' astronauts aimed solar-energy monitors at the sun Wednesday for clues about the dwindling ozone layer and global

comparing their findings with those made at the same time by similar instruments on permanently orbiting satellites. This way, researchers can check the accuracy of the satellite instruments and perform any necessary adjustments.

Unlike the instruments on Atlantis, satellite monitors cannot be brought back to Earth for fine-tuning.

Early Wednesday afternoon, the astronauts tilted the shuttle cargo bay toward the sun for six orbits of solar observations after two days of facing Earth for stratospheric studies.

The thin, invisible layer of ozone in the stratosphere protects against dangerous ultraviolet rays. Manmade chemicals are ruining this shield.

Atlantis holds four primary solar-science instruments and three ozone monitors, one of which broke shortly after the flight began last Thursday. Also surveying ozone and other atmospheric gases are ultraviolet and infrared telescopes on a satellite released by the six astronauts Friday; they'll pick it up Saturday for the trip home. Atlantis is due back on Monday.

During a shuttle maneuver Wednesday, Mission Control received messages indicating several of Atlantis' big steering jets had failed. In fact, none of these jets fired and flight controllers believed the problem might be with a hand controller in the cockpit. Only the tiny steering jets are used to point the spaceship for solar and atmospheric observations.

Agents fired for blown raid appeal dismissal

DALLAS (AP) — Two federal agents fired for not calling off last year's blown raid on the Branch Davidians said Wednesday that their side of the story was ignored by investigators trying to blame someone for the tragedy.

Phillip Chojnacki and Charles Sarabyn said they were wrongly singled out in a Treasury Department report that led to the loss of their jobs as heads of the Houston office of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

"Someone had drawn a conclusion and the investigation was being manipulated to come up with that conclusion," Chojnacki said. "They took everybody else's opinion but ours."

Treasury spokesman Chris Peacock said Chojnacki and Sarabyn had a chance to give their side of the story when they met with investigators in Texas and Assistant Treasury Secretary Ronald Noble in Washington.

"All agents were given an opportunity to be heard fully and completely in the review," Peacock said.

The former agents, speaking

publicly for the first time since the Feb. 28, 1993, attack against David Koresh and his followers, told The Associated Press they believed all along they were being shafted, although they didn't expect to be fired. They are appealing to get their jobs back.

Sarabyn said he complained to Noble in a letter that investigators weren't listening to him.

Chojnacki, who was with the ATF 24 years, and Sarabyn, an 18-year veteran, were blamed in the Treasury report for not calling off the raid after losing the element of surprise.

They said several agents knew that Koresh had told his followers "the ATF is coming," but none thought anything of it because the doomsday prophet often said such things.

The Davidians were armed and ready when ATF agents stormed their compound outside Waco. Four officers and six sect members died in the confrontation that led to a 51-day standoff.

Sarabyn and Chojnacki are appealing their dismissal to the Merit Systems Protection Board.

Pet owner neglects obese pig

NORFOLK, Va. (AP) — A porker of a pig has gotten pet owner Virginia Hudgins charged with animal neglect.

"It's, believe it or not, an obese pig," said Mark Kumpf, the police department's senior humane officer.

Pinkie Starlight is a Vietnamese potbellied pig. Pigs of that breed normally weigh 65 to 100 pounds, but Pinkie tips the scales around 200 pounds. Her belly scrapes the ground when she stands, and rolls of fat from her forehead drape over her eyes so she can't see.

Hudgins' disregard of the veterinarian's warnings about the pig's weight constitutes neglect, Kumpf said.

Officers on Tuesday lured the pig from the house with a piece of bread and a trail of bread crumbs. The pig has been boarded at a farm to go on a diet.

Man found in bed with pieces of his mother, police say

AKRON, Ohio (AP) — A man found in bed with pieces of his mother's corpse confessed to her killing, telling police she was a "vampire devil" and that he "cut out both of her hearts."

Henry M. Heepe told police he beat his 77-year-old mother, Barbara Heepe, to death, then stabbed her and removed her organs.

Officers found some of the body parts in a pan on a stove, and Police Capt. Paul Callahan said investigators believe Heepe may have eaten some of the others. His mouth was smeared with blood when he was arrested, Summit County Coroner William Cox said Wednesday.

"I killed my mother," Heepe was quoted as saying in a police report. "She was a vampire devil. I cut out both of her hearts. It took her five hours to die."

An autopsy that lasted all day Wednesday showed Heepe's mother had been beaten around the face, head, chest and arms and strangled, Cox said.

She was stabbed and disemboweled after she died, the coroner said.

Heepe, 50, was charged with murder. His arraignment was delayed while he was hospitalized Wednesday for treatment of diabetes.

Police entered the Heepe home Monday night after a neighbor, Mary Hendrickson, said a boy raking leaves reported hearing a woman cry for help.

As officers checked the house, they heard a man chanting, "Die, die, die," the Akron Beacon Journal reported Wednesday. They said Heepe had barricaded himself inside a bedroom and refused to come out.

After trying for more than an hour to talk him into leaving the room, they finally forced open the door and discovered him nude on the bed, surrounded by pieces of the corpse.

He was apparently engaging in a sex act with the bowel, Cox said.

The lower half of the woman's stomach, her right eye, her spleen and a small part of her small intestine were missing.

A knife was found near a toilet, which left open the possibility Heepe may have flushed the missing body parts down the toilet, Cox said.

Heepe was a patient at Akron General Hospital, said spokeswoman Susan Hobson, but she declined to discuss his condition.

"Because of the nature — it's sort of a psychiatric situation — we can't release any information," she said.

Hendrickson said Heepe often acted oddly. Police said he had been unstable since his younger brother committed suicide in 1970.

"It's a dirty shame," Hendrickson said. "She took care of her son."