
Understanding Ozone

What is ozone? Why do we need it? Until recent history the general population didn't know the answer to these questions. In our blindness we have consistently and steadily been destroying it, not on purpose but by our own ignorance and need for our high quality of life. We have been releasing harmful chemicals into our atmosphere. So what really is this ozone? Quite simply it is an invisible shield surrounding the Earth protecting us from the fierce uncontrolled sun. The sun is so powerful it projects harmful rays all the way to Earth, when they hit the ozone layer they cause a chemical reaction with a gas called ozone in the stratosphere. The harmful sun ray splits the molecule apart, but it is stopped. Eventually the molecules in the ozone will realign and be able to stop another harmful sun ray. The balance of sun ray and demand on the ozone layer has been balanced for billions of years on Earth. But unfortunately people have been unknowingly been releasing CFCs (chlorofluorocarbons) and halons into the ozone layer. These chemicals put an increased demand on the ozone layer also breaking apart the molecules. The once balanced ozone layer now has an additional demand, and harmful sun rays manage to get through. These chemicals may stay in the ozone layer for up to one hundred years, breaking apart the ozone layer. Probably the main reason we pollute our environment, and then turn a blind eye, is that it does not affect us. We do not care what does not concern our life. And that was true for the ozone layer, until very recently. The ozone layer is developing a hole, or thinning. It is steadily growing letting in more and more harmful UV rays. The UV rays are very dangerous, and are responsible for many deaths. Where it once seemed perfectly innocent to take your family out to the beach and sunbathe for hours, it is unheard of. Excessive exposure to UV radiation has been linked to many fatal instances of skin cancer. The damage is not limited to ourselves, destruction of the ozone layer has been linked to many other problems such as destruction of agriculture, impact on aquatic life such as the fishing and shrimp industry, forests and weakening of industrial materials such as plastic.

Now for the good news. The destruction of the ozone layer is not permanent. If industries stop putting harmful chemicals into their products and we stop using them, eventually the ozone layer will repair itself. But it will take many years, another lesson people will learn before we stop destroying the only home we have. In recent years very strict laws have been placed on companies producing chemicals that are harmful to our ozone layer, people have been made much more aware of our individual roles in the ozone layer depletion. We are slowly changing our ways. Hopefully we will be able to change before it's too late. One might look at the problems associated with the pollution of our planet, notably the ozone layer and start to lose hope. That there might be no solution to our problem, it's just too big. No one can do anything to change. Fortunately for the rest of the world, those few skeptics have been gravely proven wrong. When the entire world reaches a global crisis so devastating, such as this we come

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together. People which weren't educated twenty years ago, are now being taught from Kindergarten right through to retirement of the damage they are doing. The situation looks very dismal right now, but the future has not yet been written, together we can and will change.

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