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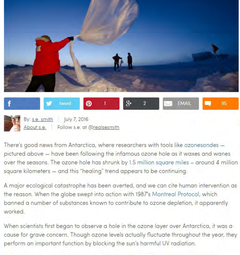
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The Antarctic Ozone Hole May Be Closing



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By: Lia_smith | July 7, 2016
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There's good news from Antarctica, where researchers with tools like ozonesondes -- pictured above -- have been following the infamous ozone hole as it waxes and wanes over the seasons. The ozone hole has shrunk by 1.5 million square miles -- around 4 million square kilometers -- and this "healing" trend appears to be continuing.

A major ecological catastrophe has been averted, and we can cite human intervention as the reason. When the globe swept into action with 1987's Montreal Protocol, which banned a number of substances known to contribute to ozone depletion, it apparently worked.

When scientists first began to observe a hole in the ozone layer over Antarctica, it was a cause for grave concern. Though ozone levels actually fluctuate throughout the year, they perform an important function by blocking the sun's harmful UV radiation.

Without the ozone layer, Earth would be uninhabitable. Thus, when humans began producing and using compounds that ate away at the ozone layer, like coolants in the CFC class -- from a particularly infamous -- they started unwittingly destroying their own habitat.

Getting the nations of the world to collectively agree to the Montreal Protocol was a challenge, but it was extremely important. Without the world on board, some countries would have continued to use substances that would damage the environment.

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Even now, we're learning that compounds previously recognized as safe are actually much more dangerous than we realized, highlighting the importance of ongoing research and regulation.

One unwitting consequence of regulation to eliminate ozone-depleting products has been a rise in those that appear to contribute to climate change, unfortunately.

These scientists didn't just examine the time of year when the ozone hole is the largest. They also gathered data from September, when the hole first begins to open up as Antarctica starts to see the sun again.

They found that the hole is forming later and later -- a very good sign -- and it's smaller.

Researchers were briefly thrown off last year, when the hole was actually quite large, but they realized that a volcanic eruption was responsible for spewing chemicals that formed the ozone layer into the atmosphere. While we can regulate the chemicals people use, it's a bit of a challenge to ask volcanoes to stop erupting.

But the ozone layer isn't out of the woods quite yet.

Scientists have shown that if we identify an environmental problem and implement a science-based policy solution, we can start to reverse that problem, just as the DDT ban proved beneficial to the world's birds.

But we need to maintain pressure on this legislation to allow the environment to continue to heal. Imagine if we abruptly reversed the DDT ban and promptly endangered the world's birds.

It's important to maintain existing regulations and to continue identifying compounds that are hazardous to the ozone layer, so we can restrict their use.

And this is highly relevant for climate change, as scientists have struggled when it comes to convincing the world to cut down on some of the most harmful emissions associated with greenhouse gases.

The successful case study of the ozone hole could prove to be an incredibly valuable tool for educating politicians and regulators about the importance of the environment and the role humans can play in protecting it.

Scientists are consistently warning that we're on the verge of being too late to address climate change, and it's imperative that we act.

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Quanta Kiran 14 hours ago
Good news, but not great. the melting process has already begun and it appears to be a chain reaction with shelves breaking off.

And no one tell the climate change naysayers. Last thing we need is those bumblers to spin it as a "all is right with the world story".

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Jeanne Rogers 2 days ago
Thank you for sharing.

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Lori Hone 2 days ago
Maybe we're not to late after all

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Glad to hear it. Always nice to hear good news!

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