

20. Saving The Ozone Layer & Protecting Our Health

Introduction

International agreements, if legally binding, go a long way to solving environmental problems like that of ozone depletion. However, for there to be real and long-lasting success, everyone must become part of the solution. The collective impact of environmental citizenship is much greater than the sum of the parts. Individual efforts taken together can be powerful forces for environmental change. There are a number of things that we, as individuals, can do to both protect the ozone layer and to safeguard our health against the effects of increasing ultraviolet radiation.

Protecting our Health



Sunglasses that provide 99-100% UV-A and UV-B protection will greatly reduce sun exposure that can lead to cataracts and other eye damage. Check the label when buying sunglasses.

A hat with a wide brim offers good sun protection to your eyes, ears, face, and the back of your neck - areas particularly prone to overexposure to the Sun.



Tightly-woven, loose-fitting clothes offer excellent protection against UV. Any clothing is better than none at all.

A sunscreen with protection factor of at least 15 blocks most harmful UV radiation. Apply sunscreen liberally and reapply every 2 hours

when working, playing, or exercising outdoors. Even waterproof sunscreen can come off when you dry yourself off with a towel.

The Sun's UV rays are strongest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. To the extent you can, limit exposure to the Sun during these hours.

Sunlamps damage the skin and unprotected eyes and are best avoided entirely.

Protecting the Ozone Layer

There are a number of steps that we can all take, both as individuals and as groups, to protect the Earth's fragile shield. We have all been part of the ozone depletion problem, through the use of chemicals in everyday products. However, we can all be part of the solution.



Following the Montreal Protocol most ODCs have or are being phased out of use in most target applications such as aerosols, refrigeration and air conditioning (e.g. in cars). However, consumer products bought prior to international agreements may still be in use in our homes and offices and cannot easily be replaced. Large appliances, such as refrigerators, have long lifetimes and early replacement would entail great cost. Proper care and maintenance of equipment to ensure that the CFCs they contain are never released to the stratosphere should be applied. Remember, a single CFC molecule can destroy 100,000 ozone molecules.

In addition, if purchasing fire extinguishers try to avoid any that contain halons. Purchase carbon dioxide, water, or dry chemical extinguishers instead. Finally, although foam packaging is CFC-free, some products contain HCFCs, which while far less damaging to the ozone layer, could contribute substantially to global warming. Avoid those that do. Use and re-use non-disposable packaging.