

Special Edition for McCarthy area subscribers

Local Ozone Layer Takes a Heavy Hit

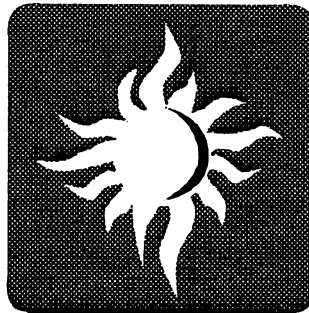
Scientists say harmful ultraviolet radiation may be 19% higher than normal this summer in Wrangells

BY ED LACHAPELLE

Data just released by NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center indicate that the ozone mapping sensor on the Nimbus-7 satellite has found an alarming decrease in the stratospheric ozone levels beyond that already reported for the notorious Antarctic ozone hole. Ozone is the trace gas in the upper atmosphere responsible for blocking much of the harmful part of the ultraviolet spectrum. The NASA researchers report there have been sharp drops in the ozone levels everywhere outside the poles, except along the equator. In the temperate mid latitudes, the drop has amounted to about 9%, leading to about 12% increase in harmful ultraviolet reaching the earth's surface.

The maximum ozone losses, about 14%, were found around latitude 60 degrees N., corresponding closely to our own part of the world here in the Wrangell Mountains. Such an ozone

loss corresponds to about a 19% increase in harmful ultraviolet radiation. These losses were found from data for 1992 and into early 1993. They are expected to continue at these levels through the summer of 1993.



These sudden drops in worldwide ozone levels are thought to have been triggered by the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in the Philippines in June of 1991. This huge eruption injected large amounts of gases and debris into the stratosphere which have now become distributed all around the

world. Alterations of upper atmospheric chemistry and wind patterns are blamed for the effects on the protective ozone blanket.

Sun-bathing enthusiasts in this part of the world need to be cautious about the extra risks of sunburn and melanoma this summer. Especial care should be exercised by mountain climbing parties at high altitudes. Stock up on sun block along with the mosquito repellents! (Perhaps some enterprising pharmacist can come up with a double-acting lotion that will handle both.)

The Public Health Service advises that people placed at most risk by the enhanced ultraviolet exposure this summer are those who are permanent residents at these latitudes and who spend much of their time outdoors. The risk is slight for short-term visitors who will soon return to lower latitudes.