

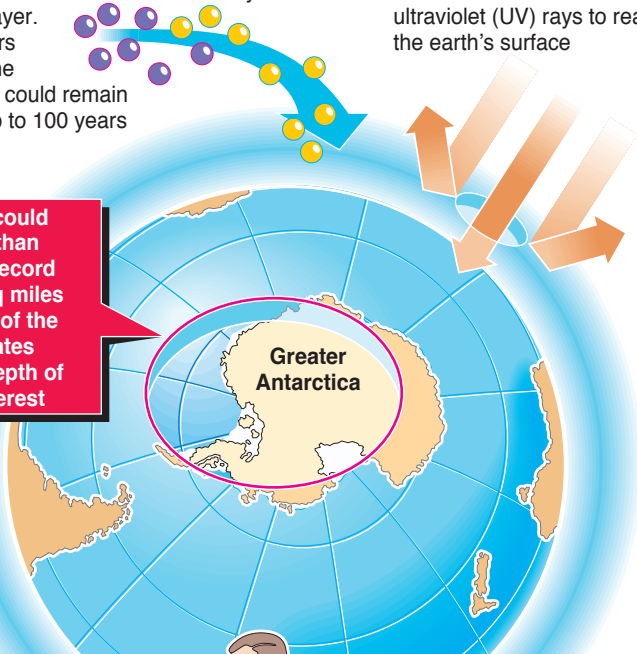
Danger shining through the sky

The World Meteorological Organisation warn that ozone levels over the Antarctic fell sharply in August, dropping by 35-50 percent. The fall in levels – which began several weeks earlier than in previous years – has raised fears that damage to the earth's protective ozone layer is worsening

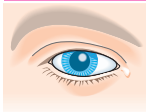
1. CFCs disintegrate in the stratosphere, releasing chlorine atoms which destroy the ozone layer. Ozone-eaters already in the atmosphere could remain active for up to 100 years

2. 'Holes' in the ozone layer allow harmful unfiltered ultraviolet (UV) rays to reach the earth's surface

The hole could be larger than the 1992 record of 9.7m sq miles – the size of the United States and the depth of Mount Everest



3. The damaging effects of ultraviolet radiation



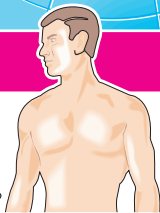
Eyes

Increased danger of cataracts: causes blurred vision and blindness if untreated



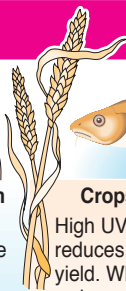
Skin

Premature ageing and increased risk of skin cancers, including frequently fatal melanomas



Immune system

Ultraviolet light can damage the body's immune system, exacerbating problems for AIDS sufferers



Crops

High UV dose reduces crop yield. Wheat, sorghum and peas already affected in Australia



Marine life

Radiation kills phytoplankton and krill, organisms at the bottom of the food chain