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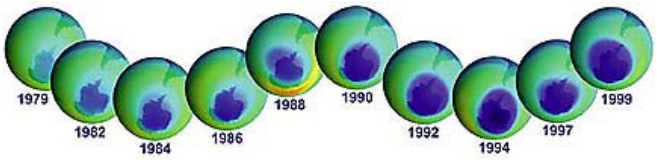
NASA Has Launched Aura Satellite to Study Ozone-Destroying Chemicals in Atmosphere

"If we don't understand what we're doing to our home planet, we may drive ourselves all into extinction."
- Mike Tanner, NASA Scientist, Aura Satellite



Total Ozone Mapping Spectrometer (TOMS) data from 1979 to 1999 shows the growth of the ozone hole over Antarctica over twenty years. Images provided by NASA.

August 16, 2004 Cape Canaveral, Florida - As the ozone holes over the North and South polar regions have enlarged every year since monitoring began in 1979, the U. S. government and scientists agree it is important to study the Earth's atmospheric chemistry more closely. After several delays, NASA finally launched an environmental research satellite called "Aura" (Latin for "air" or "breath") on Sunday, August 15, 2004, from Vandenberg AFB in California.

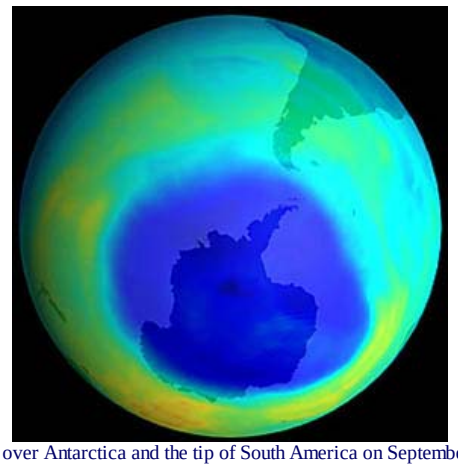
Aura satellite launched successfully on July 15, 2004, from Vandenberg Air Force Base, California. Photograph by Thom Baur, Boeing.

Artist's rendition of Aura satellite that will study the Earth's atmosphere from the surface to the outer edge of space courtesy NASA, Greenbelt, Maryland.

For at least five years, Aura will study the chemicals in the atmosphere which can destroy ozone as well as air quality and climate. "This mission is designed exclusively to conduct research on the composition, chemistry and dynamics of the Earth's upper and lower atmosphere employing multiple instruments on a single satellite." Aura is the third satellite in NASA's Earth Observing System (EOS). Earlier in December 1999, "Terra" was launched to focus its sensors on heat emitted from Earth and the amount of sunlight

reflected from our planet's surface. The goal is to better understand how the heat interacts with Earth's oceans and atmosphere. Three years later in May 2002, "Aqua" was launched to study the world's oceans and cycles of evaporation into the atmosphere and return as rain and snow.

Aura carries four instruments that will scan the atmosphere from Earth's surface to the edge of space every day. The chief scientist leading the Aura research is Philip DeCola, Program Scientist, NASA Headquarters, Washington, D. C. He said about the $785 million Aura mission, "Think about the atmosphere. It's one of the most precious resources that we have as residents of this planet." His colleague, Mike Tanner, added: "If we don't understand what we're doing to our home planet, we may drive ourselves all into extinction."



Ozone hole over Antarctica and the tip of South America on September 11, 2003.
Image courtesy NASA.

Website:

http://aura.gsfc.nasa.gov/

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