Haze Encyclopedia Article

Haze

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Haze

An **aerosol** in the **atmosphere** of sufficient concentration and extent to decrease **visibility** significantly when the relative humidity is below saturation is known as haze. Haze may contain dry particles or droplets or a mixture of both, depending on the precise value of the humidity. In the use of the word, there is a connotation of some degree of permanence. For example, a dust storm is not a haze, but the coarse particles may settle rapidly and leave a haze behind once the velocity drops.

Human activity is responsible for many hazes. Enhanced **emission** of **sulfur dioxide** results in the formation of aerosols of sulfuric **acid**. In the presence of ammonia, which is excreted by most higher animals including humans, such emissions result in aerosols of ammonium sulfate and bisulfate. Organic hazes are part of **photochemical smog**, such as the **smog** often associated with Los Angeles, and they consist primarily of polyfunctional, highly oxygenated compounds with at least five **carbon** atoms. Such hazes can also form if air with an enhanced **nitrogen** oxide content meets air containing the natural terpenes emitted by vegetation.

All hazes, however, are not products of human activity. Natural hazes can result from forest fires, dust storms, and the natural processes that convert gaseous contaminants into particles for subsequent removal by precipitation or deposition to the surface or to vegetation. Still other hazes are of mixed origin, as noted above, and an event such as a dust storm can be enhanced by human-caused devegetation of **soil**.

Though it may contain particles injurious to health, haze is not of itself a health hazard. It can have a significant economic impact, however, when tourists cannot see scenic views, or if it becomes sufficiently dense to inhibit aircraft operations.

See Also

Air Pollution; Air Quality; Air Quality Criteria; Los Angeles Basin; Mexico City, Mexico

Resources

Books

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