

'Chicken Little' Syndrome Revived

BRACE yourself for another round of debates over whether mankind is altering the ozone so that radiation and sunlight could penetrate our atmosphere in ways that might destroy life on earth.

The latest issue of Chemical & Engineering News, published by American Chemical Society, says, "as if some class officer were planning a 10th-year reunion, another major round of activities to scrutinize the ozone question is about to start."

Scientists theorized in the early 1970s that fluorocarbons used as spray propellants for deodorants, insecticides, paints and other materials were rising far beyond earth's atmosphere.

Extent of alleged damage to the ozone never was settled but use of fluorocarbons in spray cans was banned by the government.

"Though measurements thus far have not proved or disproved that any ozone has been destroyed, revised forecasts call for eventual loss of up to 20 per cent of the stratosphere's ozone," C&NE states in its

review of the controversial issue.

Government bureaus do not wait for things to be proved to write regulations and issue bans. Multi-million dollar studies may be set up later to determine facts, often much later.

When the previous scientific fracas over the ozone was in progress, it was reported the United States produced no more than half the world's output of fluorocarbons, and only half of this country's output was used as propellants in spray cans.

Fluorocarbons also are in refrigeration units, air conditioners, insulation and other widely used products.

"Sky is falling" scientists also claim nitrogen fertilizer, essential to food production, sends up materials to damage ozone.

Citizens may not be able to comprehend how chemical elements may escape from their bathrooms or crops to create mammoth problems higher than planes can fly. They can see how government bans

or regulations affect their standards of living, convenience and costs.

As if it were not enough for us to be asked to worry about damaging the ozone and polluting the local air we breathe, still another atmospheric hazard has been discovered.

This is an epidemic of "acid rain," which has driven some east coast scientists into a frenzy.

"Most of the precipitation that falls on the eastern United States is as acid as tomato juice and some as acid as vinegar," said Newsweek magazine recently.

It was said acid rain is caused partly by tall smokestacks built to reduce ground level air pollution. Apparently, they send objectionable fumes higher, so that they are picked up by clouds, moved around by winds and fall sourly to earth.

When you consider all of these invisible perils turned up by scientists, inflation and the atomic bomb may not look quite so hazardous by comparison.