

Customising clouds to stop global warming

An engineering professor and a cloud physics expert have been pumping salt into clouds to change the way they reflect light from the sun in an attempt to stop the planet heating up.

By Jessica Salter

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Stephen Salter, professor of engineering design at the University Edinburgh, and Professor John Latham, from the National Centre for Atmospheric Research in Colorado, have been using Salt Flares to test if it is possible to seed or even create Marine Stratocumulus Clouds.

These clouds, which are common, low-flying clouds, could help reflect the sun's rays and therefore combat global warming.

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Prof Salter said: "We need to make them reflect about 10 per cent more than they are reflecting now."

Prof Latham added: "We've got the most massive global problem that we've ever had, so we've got to think big."

The flares will spray up salt water into the clouds. When the particles rise into a cloud they redistribute the moisture, increasing its reflectivity.

As a result the cloud bounces more sunlight back into space.

Approximately 300 flares will be released at sea level from a boat moored off the South African coast.

Scientists around the world are developing tools to try to prevent global warming from getting worse and have been experimenting with increasingly adventurous ideas.

The science known as "geo-engineering" is considered dangerous by some for interfering with the world's delicate ecosystems, however advocates claim that it could "save the world" from catastrophic global warming.

The biggest concern about Prof Salter and Latham's experiment is that altering cloud structure and density over such a large area may have unknown and significant local effects on climate, particularly rainfall patterns.

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