

Glossary

ATMOSPHERE AND CLIMATE CHANGE

C

chlorofluorocarbons hydrocarbons in which some or all of the hydrogen atoms are replaced by chlorine and fluorine; used in coolants for refrigerators and air conditioners and in cleaning solvents; their use is restricted because they destroy ozone molecules in the stratosphere (abbreviation, CFCs)

climate the average weather conditions in an area over a long period of time

E

El Niño (el NEEN yoh) the warm phase of the El Niño–Southern Oscillation; a periodic occurrence in the eastern Pacific Ocean in which the surfacewater temperature becomes unusually warm

G

global warming a gradual increase in the average global temperature that is due to a higher concentration of gases such as carbon dioxide in the atmosphere

greenhouse gas a gas composed of molecules that absorb and radiate infrared radiation from the sun

K

Kyoto Protocol an international treaty according to which developed countries that signed the treaty agree to reduce their emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases that may contribute to global warming by 2012

L

La Niña (la NEEN yah) the cool phase of the El Niño–Southern Oscillation; a periodic occurrence in the eastern Pacific Ocean in which the surfacewater temperature becomes unusually cool

latitude the distance north or south from the equator; expressed in degrees

O

ozone hole a thinning of stratospheric ozone that occurs over the poles during the spring

ozone layer the layer of the atmosphere at an altitude of 15 to 40 km in which ozone absorbs ultraviolet solar radiation

P

polar stratospheric cloud a cloud that forms at altitudes of about 21,000 m during the Arctic and Antarctic winter or early spring, when air temperatures drop below -80°C

W

weather the short-term state of the atmosphere, including temperature, humidity, precipitation, wind, and visibility