

Climate Change workshop #3

Estimate the ocean's age from its salinity

By Dr. Richard Gammon, UW Seattle

(recorded by Dr. E.J. Zita, Evergreen St. College, Olympia)

Assume the ocean accumulates salt from influx due to rivers.
Neglect salt dilution and removal processes.

(Discuss these assumptions before proceeding...)

In steady-state, $\text{Burden} = F_{\text{in}} * T = F_{\text{out}} * T$ where $T = \text{lifetime}$

$B = \text{salt in oceans now} = 5 \times 10^{22} \text{ g}$

Flux in from rivers: $F_{\text{in}} = 4 \times 10^{15} \text{ g salt/year}$

How long has the ocean been accumulating salt from rivers?

$$T = B / F = 5 \times 10^{22} \text{ g} / 4 \times 10^{15} \text{ g salt/year} \sim 10^7 \text{ year} = 10 \text{ million years}$$

Wait a minute – the oceans are much older than this. What's wrong with our assumptions?

- each year 3 feet of ocean evaporates
- and 3 feet of rain falls (Seattle rainfall is about average)
- plus salt deposits on the ocean floor are probably subducted...

Other salt loss mechanisms?