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# Potent geomagnetic storm hits Earth disrupting airline communications

By Joseph Verrengia  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DENVER — The most powerful geomagnetic storm possible walloped the Earth early Wednesday, knocking out some airline communications but apparently causing no large power outages or other major problems.

The storm, the most disruptive to hit Earth since 1989, was unleashed by the fourth-most powerful solar flare ever seen, NASA said.

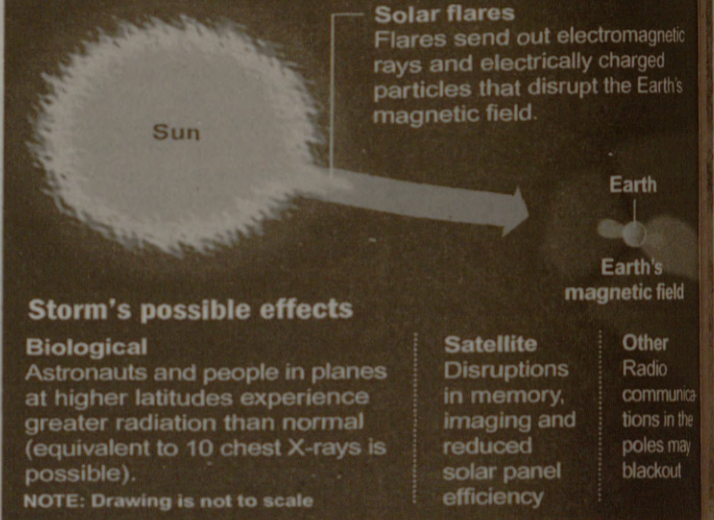
The gigantic cloud of highly charged particles hurled from the sun posed a threat to electric utilities, high frequency radio communications, satellite navigation systems and television broadcasts. Continued turbulence on the sun remains a concern for the next week, space forecasters say.

The biggest immediate effect was the blackout of high-frequency voice-radio communications for planes flying far northern routes.

But airliners in an emergency could still communicate through VHF contact with another aircraft or military monitoring station, said Louis Garneau, a spokesman for the company that handles Canada's civil aviation navigation service.

## Solar storm causes disruptions

A large solar storm traveled to Earth Wednesday in about 19 hours. Typically storms can take more than four days to reach the Earth. Storms of this size occur about three times every 11 years.



SOURCE: NASA

by various utilities: making less electricity at generating stations, removing vulnerable transmission lines from service and adding voltage control equipment.

The increased solar activity is also affecting the international space station. The Expedition 8 crew, Commander Mike Foale and Russian cosmonaut Alexander Kaleri, briefly retreated to the aft end of the station's service module, which is shielded from higher levels of radiation.

The pair will spend about 20 minutes there, twice on each orbit of the Earth for about three orbits, until the station phases out of the high radiation areas.

The sun generates flares and particle storms in 11-year cycles as sunspots develop. The current solar cycle peaked nearly three years ago, so such a powerful event occurring on the cycle's downside is especially surprising.

In Tokyo, Japan's space agency said the Kodama commu-

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British controllers were keeping trans-Atlantic jets on more southerly routes than usual to avoid the problem.

The particle storm, measuring 13 times larger than Earth, was rated a G5, the highest intensity on scientists' scale of space weather. Space observers have measured G5 storms five times in the past 15 years, but few of them have hit Earth so directly.

It whipped through the solar system at about 5 million mph, taking just 19 hours to travel the 93 million miles from the sun to

envelop the planet. Federal scientists said it collided with Earth's magnetic field at 1:13 a.m. EST on Wednesday, about 12 hours earlier than predicted.

Last week, a weaker solar flare erupted on the sun's surface, but scientists said the particle cloud from that event largely spared the planet.

Such storms pose no direct threat to people on the ground because the Earth's thick atmosphere deflects and absorbs incoming charged particles. But the storm may produce colorful auroras in the northern night sky visible as far south as El Paso, Texas, beginning late Wednesday.

The last time a G5 storm hit Earth was in 1989, which damaged the power grid and caused electrical blackouts in the Canadian province of Quebec.

"It is extremely rare to get this level of geomagnetic storming," said Larry Combs, forecaster for the Space Weather Center at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Boulder. "This is one of the strongest storms that we have received during this cycle."

There were few immediate reports of damage related to the geomagnetic storm. However, Combs said, "We know that our power grids are definitely feeling the effects of this."

That's because disruptions in the magnetic field caused by the incoming particles can induce power surges and other current fluctuations in electrical systems.

In Princeton, N.J., officials at the North American Electric Reliability Council, which oversees the power grid, said this storm had not caused any failures so far. Geomagnetic storms have caused power disturbances in the United States and Canada at least 11 times since 1940.

Among the precautions taken

atly after the attack, when worried callers swamped the city's "missing" hot lines to report a friend or relative they hadn't heard from.

Missing-person reports poured in from around the world, many from people who gave only sketchy information, partial phone numbers, misspelled names and few details.

The city formed a group called the Reported Missing Committee, charged with weeding out fraud and crossing errors off the death list, which peaked at 6,700 two weeks after the attack.

As of early September 2003, police had made about 40 arrests related to people falsely claiming they lost loved ones, and law enforcement agencies in other cities have nabbed others.

In most cases, victims whose remains have not been identified

## 40 names removed from WTC death toll

By Sara Kugler  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Forty names listed on the World Trade Center death toll for more than two years were removed Wednesday because the city cannot confirm their deaths or — in some cases — their existence.

The list was cut from 2,792 to 2,752, a decision made by several city agencies, including the medical examiner's office, the police department and the mayor's office.

The names removed include illegal immigrants whose jobs were not well documented and people whose relatives say they were near the trade center on Sept. 11, 2001, but know little more.

Thousands of names landed on the list in the chaos immedi-

ately after the attack, when worried callers swamped the city's "missing" hot lines to report a friend or relative they hadn't heard from.

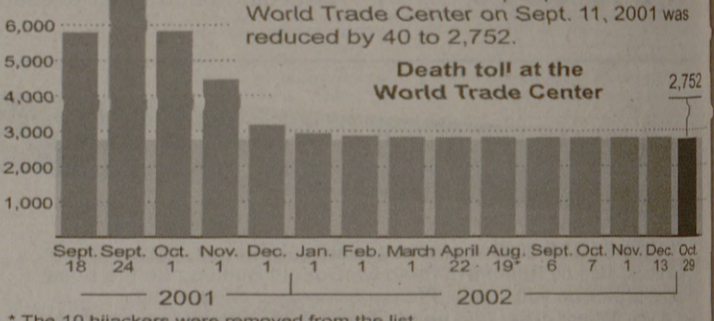
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## World Trade Center death toll adjusted



have been legally declared dead by the court and their families issued death certificates based on documents or other proof they were at the trade center or on the hijacked airplanes.

In the names removed Wednesday, no such proof was ever found and remains were never identified. About 60 percent of the victims have had remains identified.

The tally had stood at 2,792 since December 2002.

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