**Worlds Helium Supply Running Low!**

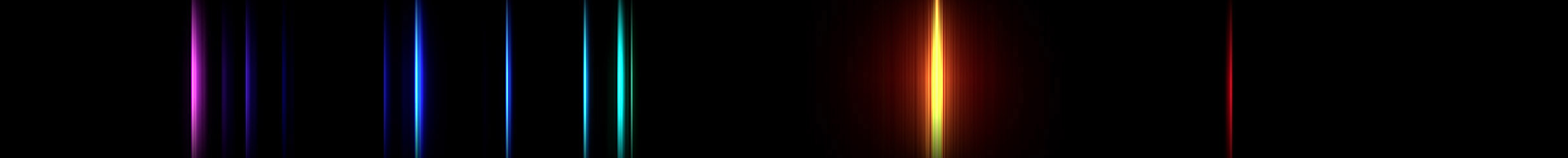


Helium, an element commonly used in party balloons, has become so scarce that scientists are worried it will be gone within the next 30 years. Researchers are blaming party patrons for squandering the element which cannot be made artificially. Helium, a substance that most party-goers seem to be familiar with, is dwindling in supply at an alarming rate according to scientists and medical professionals.

The world's second-lightest element, which is crucial to the usage of equipment such as MRI scanners and neutron beams, is disappearing so fast that experts are warning it could be gone as soon as 2025. Due to a law passed in 1996, helium has become "too cheap to recycle" and the sharply declining stock of the gas could ultimately spell doom for the medical industry says The Independent.

According to The Guardian, one of the main culprits is none other than the seemingly harmless party balloon. Whether it is for the traditional aesthetic of seeing them float in the air, or to serve the purpose of the infamous helium whippet, the element is being squandered quickly and shamelessly the experts claim.

Earth by no means has an infinite supply of helium, in fact it is highly limited on this planet despite it being the second-most abundant element in the universe. It was first discovered in 1868 by French astronomer, Pierre-Jules-César Janssen, when he noticed a yellow-colored line within the spectrum of the sun during a solar eclipse.



This line, the wavelength of which measured 587.49 nanometers, was named helium by English astronomer, Sir Norman Lockyer. The name was taken from the Greek god of the sun, Helios.

The earth's atmosphere is 0.0005 percent helium and the element is often times taken upwards into space as gravity cannot pull it down.

The second element on the periodic table is formed on this planet by a lethargic yet steadfast process of radioactive terrestrial rock decay. It is extruded from gas deposits most often in places such as Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas. In addition to party balloons, helium also allows blimps and scientific balloons; it is also utilized to protect welders, pressurize the fuel tanks of liquid-fueled rockets as well as supersonic windtunnels.

At the United Kingdom's Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, researcher Oleg Kirichek had the unpleasant surprise of discovering he could not conduct his experiments as planned due to running out of the element.

"It costs £30,000 ($55,000) a day to operate our neutron beams, but for three days we had no helium to run our experiments on those beams," said Kirichek in regards to an experiment to study the structure of matter. "In other words we wasted £90,000 ($165,000) because we couldn't get any helium. Yet we put the stuff into party balloons and let them float off into the upper atmosphere, or we use it to make our voices go squeaky for a laugh. It is very, very stupid. It makes me really angry."

Since helium is an inert gas that does not react with other chemical substances, it is safe to work with as well as vital to scientific research due to the fact it doesn't freeze even at extremely low temperatures. It can even be converted into liquid in order to accomplish such tasks as cooling nuclear reactors and NASA uses it to purge fuel from rockets, among other purposes.

"Helium is particularly important for running super-conducting magnets. These have to be cooled to -270C to operate, and liquid helium does that perfectly. These magnets are now widespread and found in machines that range from the Large Hadron Collider in Geneva to MRI scanners in hospitals," said Professor Jim Wild of Sheffield University. "Without helium, none of these machines would work. Unfortunately that threatens to be a real prospect in the near future."

Helium is not a renewable source of energy nor can it be created synthetically; after prices went down drastically in the past decade, it has been used for frivolous, as opposed to scientifically productive purposes according to Kirichek.

"Helium was cheap and we learned to be wasteful with it," he said. "Now the stockpile is used up, prices are rising and we are realizing how stupid we have been."

Cornell University Professor and Nobel physics prize winner, Robert Richardson, made the overtly blunt statement that party balloons should sell for £75 (about $140) a piece.