What is the atmosphere?

Earth’s atmosphere is a thick blanket of gases that surrounds Nunaqpak. The Iñupiaq word for atmosphere is uyumiña nunam. The uyumiña nunam is made mostly of nitrogen and oxygen. When charged particles carried by the solar wind collide with gas particles in the uyumiña nunam, some of the energy from the solar particles is transferred to the gas particles. This excites the gas, causing it to glow with a light that we know as the northern lights. Different gases produce different colors. Red and green are caused by energized oxygen at different altitudes. Pale purple, which can appear white or light blue to the human eye, is caused by energized nitrogen.

Aurora Ovals

Iñupiaq value: Respect for Nature

Visit culturalconnections.gi.alaska.edu (Multimedia) to learn more about why the aurora forms an oval over Earth’s geomagnetic north pole.
What is the atmosphere?

Earth’s atmosphere is a thick blanket of gases that surrounds **Nunaqpak**. The Iñupiaq word for atmosphere is **sila**. The **sila** is made mostly of nitrogen and oxygen. When charged particles carried by the solar wind collide with gas particles in the **sila**, some of the energy from the solar particles is transferred to the gas particles. This excites the gas, causing it to glow with a light that we know as the northern lights. Different gases produce different colors. Red and green are caused by energized oxygen at different altitudes. Pale purple, which can appear white or light blue to the human eye, is caused by energized nitrogen.

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