Satellite Imagery of Watertown Tire Fire

July 22 2005

UW-Madison researchers are using satellite imagery to measure the extent of a massive smoke plume rising from a fire at a tire recycling facility in Watertown, Wis.

A few hours after the fire began at around 10 a.m. Tuesday, July 19, NASA's Aqua satellite passed over the region and captured an image of the smoke plume. By that time, the plume of smoke extended 93 miles to the southeast, stretching across Milwaukee and over central Lake Michigan.

More than 637 square miles were covered by the plume, including 290 square miles of Lake Michigan.

The image was collected by an instrument called MODIS, one of several sensors on the Aqua satellite. While the resolution, or level of detail, in MODIS imagery is coarse, the sensor provides daily coverage of very large areas. This allows scientists to use MODIS to monitor atmospheric and lake-surface conditions across the entire Great Lakes region on a daily basis.

Researchers at the UW-Madison Environmental Remote Sensing Center processed the raw image data to enhance the visibility of the smoke plume. While the plume can easily be seen over land, it is more difficult to detect over the dark background of Lake Michigan's water.

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Source: The University of Wisconsin System

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