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UNEP video news release highlights illegal trade in CFCs: 16 September - International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer

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NAIROBI, 11 September 1998 - A video news release issued today by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) highlights the international concern that the current illegal trade in ozone depleting chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) will reduce the speed of transition to ozone-safe alternatives and delay the recovery of the ozone layer. It also details the steps being taken to curb the trade.

The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, the international environmental agreement that "Ozone Day" on 16 September commemorates, is working and the Day is a cause for some celebration. But issues like 'illegal trade' demonstrate that the battle is far from won and the ozone layer will only recover if we respond to the remaining challenges.

Made in collaboration with the Television Trust for the Environment, the video examines the causes, extent and implications of the illegal trade, whereby CFCs flow to industrialized countries, who, in accordance with the Montreal Protocol, have phased out their consumption of the substances, except for permitted essential uses. The sources are developing countries (who were given a grace period to phase out their production under the Protocol) and the Russian Federation, which is continuing to produce even though it should have stopped production in 1996.

Demand in industrialized countries comes from the fact that there are still millions of pieces of equipment, such as automobile air conditioners, designed to use CFCs. While alternatives are available to service this equipment, they are costlier and hence the demand for the cheaper CFCs. Some CFCs enter a country under the guise of another name or as recycled CFCs (which are exempted from the controls), some arrive allegedly for re-export to a developing country and are then sold on the local market, and there is plain smuggling.

The profits to be made through illegal trade, particularly to USA, where there is a heavy tax on CFCs, are enormous. "It is difficult to estimate the size of the illegal trade. Estimates vary between 20 to 30 thousand tonnes", said UNEP Executive Director, Klaus Toepfer. "But, in monetary terms this translates into a lot of money. The profits to be made are said to be higher than those obtained by exporting cocaine", he said.

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