

Statement by Steiner on the Publication of a Paper on Montreal Protocol & Climate Change

Statement by Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UN Environment Programme Executive Director, on the Publication of the Scientific Paper The Importance of the Montreal Protocol in Protecting Climate Change

5 March 2007 - I welcome today's publication of research underlining the important contribution to combating climate change made by the parallel push to reduce chemicals that damage the ozone layer, the Earth's protective shield.

The climate dimension of the Montreal Protocol is a story that is not widely known, but one that deserves more consideration by the communities involved in ozone and climate protection.

I believe the study, in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, underscores the simple fact that well-devised action to address one area of environmental concern can have multiple environmental benefits across numerous others.

It also highlights that calculating the costs of environmental action, based on narrow economic criteria, often fails to capture the wider economic opportunities and benefits that are likely to emerge.

The scientists from the Netherlands and the United States have for the first time in detail calculated the contribution to climate protection from the phasing out and reduction of chemicals like chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).

The chemicals, once commonplace in products like hair sprays and fridges, deplete the thin layer of ozone gas that filters out damaging levels of ultra violet light.

CFCs, along with a wide range of other ozone depleting substances, are being successfully phased out, reduced and controlled under the 1987 Montreal Protocol established under the auspices of UNEP. A Multilateral Fund has been created to help developing countries meet their compliance commitments with this treaty.

The researchers point out that repair of the ozone layer is not the only benefit emerging from the Montreal treaty.

They calculate that, over the period 1990 to 2010, the level of reductions will also equate in climate terms to the equivalent of eight Gigatonnes of carbon dioxide a year.

In comparison the Kyoto Protocol, the climate emissions reductions treaty and widely understood as a first step towards even bigger emission reductions necessary, is scheduled to deliver cuts in greenhouse gases equivalent to two Gigatonnes annually over the same period.

Guus Velders of MNP, the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, and colleagues believe the ozone layer protection treaty can contribute even more to combating climate change.

Some of the chemicals, introduced as alternatives to CFCs, contribute to climate change themselves, while others contribute through chemical byproducts during the the production process. Such chemicals include HCFCs and HFCs.

The researchers suggest that a combination of accelerated phase-out, the introduction of further alternatives with low greenhouse gas characteristics and relatively small changes in industrial practises, could deliver further climate benefits equivalent to somewhere over one Gigatonnes of carbon dioxide.

When this climate dimension is taken into consideration, the Montreal Protocol - which is already considered to be a highly-effective treaty that is achieving its objective is even more cost-effective because of this collateral climate benefit. This is a particularly important message coming as it does during 2007, a year that marks both the 20th Anniversary of the signing of the Montreal Protocol and the 10th Anniversary of the signing of the Kyoto Protocol.

I believe these kinds of findings should spur governments, business, civil society and individuals to look at the wider impacts of their decisions including the costs and the benefits.

Take health hazardous heavy metals like mercury for example. Research indicates that the biggest single contributor to new sources of mercury in the global environment and the food chain comes from the increased burning of coal.

There is also some evidence that rising temperatures in freshwaters like lakes is causing old mercury, locked away in sediments, to be mobilized and released back into the environment.

Thus reducing emissions from coal-fired power stations can not only contribute to combating climate change but also contribute directly and indirectly to reducing the serious threats from mercury pollution.

I know and am sure that there are many, many more example of these virtuous circles positive cost benefit case studiesshat have been brought into sharp focus by this new research on the climate benefits of combating damage to the ozone layer.

Notes to Editors

Web address of the paper The importance of the Montreal Protocol in protecting the climate, Guus J.M.Velders, Stephen O. Andersen, John S Daniel, David W. Fahey, Mack McFarland. <http://www.eurekaalert.org/bysubject/earthscience.php>

MEDIA CONTACT : Anneke Oosterhuis, Press Office (Netherlands Environmental

Assessment Agency), Bilthoven, the Netherlands; tel +31 30 274 3303,
email:anneke.oosterhuis@mnp.nl

Web address of Montreal Protocol

<http://www.ozoneinfo@unep.org>:

For More Information Please Contact Nick Nuttall, UNEP Spokesperson, on Tel:
+41 79 596 5737 or E-mail: nick.nuttall@unep.org



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