

Montreal Protocol's Success Offers Lessons for Climate Change

Parties Continue Commitment To Maximize Ozone Regime's Climate Benefits

BALI, INDONESIA – The United States, Argentina, Mauritius, and Micronesia announced at the United Nations climate conference in Indonesia that they will continue to work together to maximize the climate benefits of the world's ozone treaty, the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

Deputy Assistant Secretary for Environment Daniel Reifsnyder, from the U.S. State Department, said that the United States was interested in finding ways to reduce emissions of “banks” of ozone-depleting chemicals currently contained in refrigerators and air conditioners that otherwise will be emitted into the atmosphere at equipment end-of-life. He emphasized that Stephen Johnson, Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, wanted to work with other Parties to address banks, and capture the dual ozone and climate benefits.

“... [W]e challenge all delegations to consider ways of destroying the banks of ozone-depleting substances currently installed in equipment,” Johnson said in his statement at the 20th Anniversary Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol, in September 2007 in Montreal. “These large sources of CFCs and other ozone-depleting substances represent a ripe opportunity to both further protect the ozone layer and to reduce emissions that contribute to global climate change.”

Minister of Environment from Argentina, Romina Picolotti, said that, “Argentina agrees that we should continue the successful cooperation with the Parties to the Montreal Protocol. The cooperation under the ozone treaty is an example of developed and developing countries working together to implement solutions to a global environmental problem. In terms of the banks of old CFCs and HCFCs, they are damaging to the climate as well as the ozone layer. We have it in our means to solve this problem, and we should move quickly to do so.”

Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) are among the most commonly used coolants in refrigerators and air conditioners. As ozone-depleting chemicals, they are being phased out under the Montreal Protocol. CFCs and HCFCs also are potent greenhouse gases, thousands of times more powerful than carbon dioxide at warming the planet. Over the next several decades, CFC and HCFC emissions from refrigerators and air conditioners will make a significant contribution to climate change, and damage the ozone layer as well.

“Already, scientists tell us that the Montreal Protocol's phase-out of CFCs will reduce emissions by the equivalent of 135 billion tons of carbon dioxide between 1990 and 2010,” said Marco Gonzalez, Executive Secretary of the Ozone Secretariat. “Scientists also tell us that the historic agreement in September to accelerate the phase-out of HCFCs will reduce emissions by an additional 12-15 billion tons over the next several decades, provided that HCFCs are replaced with climate-friendly substitute chemicals and more energy efficient technologies.”

Recovering and destroying the banks of CFCs and HCFCs currently contained in refrigerators and air conditioners could avoid at least a portion of the expected 7.4 billion tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent in emissions between 2002 and 2015, with the possibility of even greater emissions beyond 2015, according to estimates by the Montreal Protocol's Technology and Economic Assessment Panel. By comparison, the Kyoto Protocol mandates a reduction of 5 billion tons below 1990 emissions from 2008 to 2012,

assuming full compliance from industrialized countries. (Kyoto's reductions will be 10 billion tons, once the 5 billion tons of growth above 1990 levels is added in.)

“Scientists are warning us that the ‘tipping point’ for abrupt and irreversible changes to the climate, including catastrophic rises in sea level, could be 10 years away,” said Ana Maria Kleymeyer, representing Argentina’s Ministry of Environment. “We’ll get immediate climate and ozone benefits from accelerating the phase-out of HCFCs. We can get additional and immediate ozone and climate benefits from eliminating emissions from banks, including a further delay before the world reaches this tipping point.”

The opportunity to reduce emissions almost immediately has drawn interest from many of the climate parties, including many of the world’s most vulnerable states.

“Island states are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, and we want to strongly support further efforts to strengthen the Montreal Protocol to capture additional climate benefits,” said Ambassador Masao Nakayama of the Federated States of Micronesia. “Preventing climate emissions from banks is another piece of low hanging fruit we can pick that will provide immediate mitigation and help us avoid abrupt changes to the climate.”

Eliminating CFC and HCFC banks also will prevent destruction of the ozone layer, which shields the earth from harmful ultraviolet radiation that can cause skin cancer and cataracts, a weakened immune system, and damaged ecosystems and agricultural productivity.

“Creating greater incentives for the recovery and destruction of banks will help the climate, and, importantly, it also will ensure the continued success of the Montreal Protocol in fulfilling its mission to protect the ozone layer,” said Sateaved Seebaluck, Permanent Secretary of the Mauritius Environment Ministry.

“The Montreal Protocol is the world’s best environmental treaty, and the world’s best climate treaty, so far,” said Durwood Zaelke, IGSD President.

The IGSD event on the lessons of the Montreal Protocol for climate mitigation was co-sponsored by Argentina, Mauritius, Micronesia, Sweden, and the United States, as well as by the United Nations Environment Programme’s OzonAction Unit and the Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development (IGSD).

“These countries led the way to strengthen the Montreal Protocol and expand its climate mandate at the 20th Anniversary meeting in September, and it’s great to see them continue their commitment to the global atmosphere by going after the problem of banks,” Zaelke added.

The event featured panelists from the sponsoring Parties, as well as from The Netherlands and the Ozone Secretariat. The event also included a presentation by K. Madhava Sarma, former Executive Secretary of the Ozone Secretariat.

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