



Press Releases/Information Notes



Decision on Ozone Damaging Pesticide Deferred into 2004

Process Continues with Countries Asking for More Time to Resolve Complexities Surrounding Methyl Bromide Phase Out

Nairobi, 14 November 2003 - A decision on whether to grant so called Critical Use Exemptions for methyl bromide, the pesticide and ozone layer depleting chemical, was today deferred to next year.

Delegates attending meeting at the headquarters of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Nairobi, Kenya, agreed that they needed more time to discuss the complex questions of how big such exemptions should be for developed world farmers.

The 'extraordinary meeting', to be hosted by UNEP in Montreal, Canada, in March 2004, continues the process towards a total phasing out of methyl bromide which began in 1996.

Under the terms of the Montreal Protocol, developed countries have agreed to phase out their consumption of methyl bromide, a chemical used to kill pests such as nematode worms, by 1 January 2005.

However some farmers, including strawberry, melon, pepper and tomato growers predominantly in North America and Europe, have argued that the current available alternatives are not technically or economically feasible to use.

They had asked Parties to the Montreal Protocol, the international agreement drawn up to phase-out ozone depleting chemicals in order to heal the ozone layer, for exemptions amounting to around 15,000 tonnes of methyl bromide for the year 2005.

Klaus Toepfer, UNEP's Executive Director, said: "Unfortunately and despite a great deal of discussion, governments could not find consensus on this complex issue at this week's meeting. They felt they needed more time to find an agreement which balances the interests of farmers and other users of methyl bromide with international agreements to repair the Earth's protective shield".

He said the agreement to defer decisions to an "extraordinary meeting" underlined the importance that all governments attach to the Protocol and its provisions for healing the ozone layer which filters out harmful levels of ultra violet light from the sun.

"The Montreal Protocol has so far been one of the great environmental success stories. Developed countries have already phased out Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) once commonly used in products like fridges and hair sprays along with several other chemicals with high ozone depleting potential. Consumption of methyl bromide, one of the last key chemicals that needs to be phased out, in developed countries has also been reduced by 70 per cent since the mid-1990s," said Mr Toepfer.

He said the rights of countries to seek exemptions as a way of smoothing the way to total phase outs of ozone damaging chemicals, was one of the important provisions enshrined in the Protocol.

"CFCs are used in, for example, inhalers for conditions like asthma. Parties have approved essential use exemptions in this area, but there is no suggestion that these have abused or that the integrity of the Montreal Protocol is under threat," said Mr Toepfer.

Indeed one of the many decisions that have been approved at this week's meeting was to grant

CFC exemptions for inhalers in 2005 amounting to 3,268 tonnes, which is down from 16,000 tonnes in 1996.

Marco Gonzalez, Executive Secretary of the Ozone Secretariat, said: " I am looking forward to the coming extraordinary meeting where I fully expect that parties will conclude this round of discussions about methyl bromide".

Among over 30 other key decisions announced at this week's meeting was the appointment of Maria Nolan to the post of Chief Officer of the Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol.

The fund assists developing countries in their phase outs of ozone depleting substances. Ms. Nolan is currently Head of Stratospheric Ozone Policy in the United Kingdom, and known internationally as policy adviser to UNEP's Methyl Bromide Technical Options Committee as President of the Montreal Protocol's Implementation Committee and as the current, co-chair of the Protocol's Open Ended Working Group.

Parties also adopted a resolution that will exempt developing countries from controls covering trade in Hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) which come into effect in January 2004. HCFCs are CFC substitutes with a much lower ozone depleting potential. Controls affecting developing countries will now come into effect in 2016.

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