



UNEP DTIE OzonAction Programme under the Multilateral Fund



Ozone talks focus on action by developing countries

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GENEVA/NAIROBI, 10 July 2000 - Some three hundred diplomats and experts are meeting in Geneva this week to prepare for the 12th Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer, to be held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso from 11 to 15 December, 2000.

"Despite the impressive progress that developed countries have made over the past 10 years in phasing out CFCs and other ozone-destroying chemicals, the long atmospheric lifetimes of the chemicals already released will cause the stratospheric ozone layer to continue weakening for years to come", said Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which provides the Protocol's secretariat.

"For the next few years, the top priority for all governments will be to ensure that developing countries have the technological and financial capacity they need for moving to ozone-friendly chemicals", he said.

The Protocol's Implementation Committee is holding a one-day meeting today to review developing countries' 1998 data on CFCs. Under the Protocol, developing countries were committed to freezing their CFC emissions at average 1995-97 levels during the 12 month period that ended 30 June 2000. They must now start reducing rapidly in order to achieve a 50% cut by the year 2005; the deadline for a complete phase-out is 2010. Developed countries stopped using these chemicals almost completely in 1996.

An analysis of the 1998 data shows that CFC consumption in many developing countries is already less than or equal to the 1995-97 baseline, meaning that they are on track to meeting their phase-out commitments. In addition, eight of the nine developing countries that are CFC producers have cut production to below baseline levels. The full set of data will be publicly available in December at the Ouagadougou meeting.

These encouraging figures are strongly linked to the success of the Multilateral Fund, whose Executive Committee met last week, also in Geneva. Since 1991, the Fund has disbursed more than US\$1 billion for phasing out the consumption of 142,000 tonnes of CFCs and halons and the production of nearly 80,000 tonnes, in over 110 developing countries.

Meanwhile, a lead item on the agenda of the Open-ended Working Group, which is meeting in Geneva from 10 to 14 July, is a proposal by the European Community for tightening the Protocol's phase-out schedule for developing-country consumption of HCFCs - a leading substitute for CFCs. The proposal is based on the concern that, while much less destructive than CFCs, HCFCs do contribute to ozone depletion and other substitutes are now available on the market.

Currently, developing countries are committed to freezing their use of HCFCs in 2016 and to phasing them completely out by 2040. The EC proposal calls for moving the freeze up to 2007 and for setting four interim reduction targets before the 2040 phase out.

Other items to be discussed by the Working Group this week include new ozone-depleting substances entering the market, exemptions for the use of controlled substances as process agents in the chemicals industry, measures to facilitate the transition from CFC-based metered-dose inhalers used by asthma sufferers and other technical matters.

Under the 1987 Montreal Protocol, governments have agreed to phase out chemicals that destroy stratospheric ozone, which is essential for shielding humans, plants and animals from the damaging effects of ultraviolet light. Recent years have seen record thinning of the ozone layer, including an ever-larger ozone "hole" over Antarctica. According to the World Meteorological Organization, the hole exceeded 22 million km during the September 1999 Antarctic spring. Scientists predict that the ozone layer will start to recover in the near future and will fully recover some time in the 21st century- but only if the Protocol continues to be vigorously enforced.

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