



Press Releases/Information Notes



Tighter controls sought for new ozone-destroying chemicals

Montreal/Nairobi, 24 July 2001 - Experts and diplomats from the 178 countries that are Parties to the Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer are meeting in Montreal from 24-26 July to review options for further tightening the international regime for protecting the stratospheric ozone layer.

"To ensure that the global phase-out of CFCs and other destructive chemicals is as air-tight as possible, we must address all remaining avenues by which ozone-destroying substances enter the atmosphere despite existing controls," said Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, under whose auspices the 1987 Montreal Protocol was adopted.

"Major concerns include illegal trade in CFCs and other controlled substances, the lack of alternatives for certain small but essential uses, and the development and marketing by industry of new ozone-depleting chemicals not yet covered by the Protocol," he said.

The Protocol's Technology and Economic Assessment Panel (TEAP) has already been asked to conduct an annual review of any new substances with significant ozone-depleting potential that may enter the market. This week in Montreal, the TEAP and the Scientific Assessment Panel will present their proposals to the Parties on how to move forward in controlling these new substances.

Other issues on the agenda include reducing emissions from ozone-depleting chemicals used as process agents (chemical catalysts), reviewing applications for essential-use exemptions for CFCs and other ozone-depleting chemicals for 2002 and beyond, launching a study on monitoring and preventing illegal trade, developing national management plans for reducing Halons in critical uses (such as fire-fighting) and considering critical-use exemptions for methyl bromide to be implemented beginning 2005.

The issue raised previously by the European Community regarding the tightening of the Protocol's phase-out schedule for developing country consumption of HCFCs ? a leading substitute for CFCs ? will also be discussed at the meeting. The proposal by the European Commission is based on the concern that, while much less destructive to the ozone layer than CFCs, HCFCs do contribute to ozone depletion, and alternatives are now available on the market.

Still another key agenda item is preparing the terms of reference for a study on the replenishment of the Multilateral Fund for 2003-2005. This study will help governments determine the level at which the Multilateral Fund should be replenished for the next three-year period. The Multilateral Fund helps developing countries fund the incremental costs of phasing out ozone-depleting substances with ozone-friendly alternatives.

Currently, the developing countries are committed to a freeze in their production and consumption of CFCs at average 1995-1997 levels. In 2002 they will also be required to freeze Halons and methyl bromide. During the three-year period 2003-2005, the developing countries will be further required to reduce the consumption of all major ozone-depleting substances: CFCs, Halons, carbon tetrachloride, methyl chloroform and methyl bromide.

While enormous progress has been made in reducing emissions of CFCs and other chemicals, the ozone layer continues to thin as a result of past emissions. In September 2000, satellite measurements reported that the ozone "hole" over the Antarctic had reached a record 28.3 million square kilometres (some one million square km more than the previous record, in 1998).

While not attaining recent record levels, the ozone layer over the Canadian Arctic declined by 20% for a short time this spring, while over Northern Siberia the decline exceeded 30% in early March. Declines of 10 to 12% were measured over large areas of densely settled Europe, and declines of 6 to 10% were recorded over North America.

Meanwhile, global climate change is thought to be affecting the ozone layer's healing process. This issue will be addressed by the Scientific Assessment Panel in their 2002 report on the Scientific Assessment of the Ozone Layer.

The results of this week's 21st meeting of the Open-ended Working Group will be forwarded for final approval by the 13th Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol, to be held in Colombo, Sri Lanka from 15-19 October 2001.

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 harmful ultraviolet light. Recent years have seen record thinning of the ozone layer, including an ever-larger ozone "hole" over Antarctica. Scientists predict that the ozone layer will start to recover in the near future and will fully recover some time in mid-21st century ? but only if the Protocol continues to be vigorously enforced.

Note to journalists: For additional information, please contact Michael Graber, Officer-in-Charge and Deputy Executive Secretary, Ozone Secretariat, Nairobi, Tel: +254-2-623851, Fax: +254-2-623913, Email: Ozoneinfo@unep.org. Official documents and other materials are available on the Internet at www.unep.org/ozone/ or www.unep.ch/ozone/.

UNEP News Release 01/90

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