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Methyl Bromide Approved for Temporary Uses



Montreal, 26 March 2004 – An intergovernmental meeting here on the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer has granted limited “critical use exemptions” to 11 developed countries facing a year-end deadline for phasing out methyl bromide.

The exemptions are intended to give farmers, fumigators and other users of methyl bromide some additional time to adopt cost-effective substitutes for this ozone-destroying pesticide, which is used to eliminate pests in such crops as tomatoes, strawberries, melons, peppers, cucumbers and flowers.

“The high demand for exemptions to the methyl bromide phase out shows that governments and the private sector will have to work much harder to speed up the development and spread of ozone-friendly replacements,” said Executive Director Klaus Toepfer of the United Nations Environment Programme.

“The best way for governments to protect the integrity of the Montreal Protocol – one of the most successful and important international treaties ever adopted – is to send a powerful signal to both producers and users that methyl bromide does not have a future,” he said.

Like CFCs, which were almost entirely phased out by developed countries in 1996, methyl bromide damages the stratospheric ozone layer that protects all living things from too much solar radiation. Increased radiation leads to more skin cancers and eye cataracts; it also damages plants and animals, including the plankton that sustain the marine food chain.

Under the Montreal Protocol, developed countries have agreed to reduce methyl bromide by 25% by 1999 (compared to 1991 levels), 50% by 2001, 70% by 2003 and 100% by 1 January 2005. For developing countries (which have contributed much less to the problem of ozone depletion) the schedule started with a 2002 freeze (at average 1995-98 levels) and continues with reductions of 20% by 2005 and 100% by 2015.

Under today’s agreement, 11 developed countries have received exemptions to the phase-out totaling 13,438 metric tons of methyl bromide for 2005. The 2001 consumption figure for all 34 developed countries in 2001 was 23,488 tons (for developing countries it was 18,058).

The 11 countries are Australia (145 metric tons), Belgium (47), Canada (56), France (407), Greece (186), Italy (2,133), Japan (284), Portugal (50), Spain (1,059), the UK (129) and the US (8,942).

In addition, the US has agreed to limit its 2005 production levels for methyl bromide to 7,659 tons (equal to 30% of its baseline, as compared with 35% for its exemption). This means that it will supply some of its exemptions from existing stockpiles. Similarly, the eight EU countries will supply 100 tons of their combined 4,011-ton exemption from existing stockpiles.

The Montreal Protocol allows governments to apply for exemptions when there are no technically or economically feasible alternatives or for health or safety reasons. For example, specific exemptions have been granted under the Protocol so that developed countries can still use CFCs in Metered Dosed Inhalers (MDIs) for the treatment of asthma and other chronic respiratory diseases.

In addition to agreeing the exemptions for 2005, the meeting launched a process for elaborating more detailed procedures and reporting requirements for requesting and granting future exemptions. This process will also seek to more rigorously define the economic factors that can be used to justify an exemption.

Some 360 participants from 114 countries as well as observer organizations took part in the 24-26 March First Extraordinary Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol. The Sixteenth Meeting of the Parties will be held from 22 – 26 November 2004 in Prague; it will be preceded by an Open-Ended Working Group from 12 – 16 July in Geneva.

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