

Project Sky Hole Patching Goes into Operation

Tackling Illegal Trade in Ozone-depleting Substances and Dangerous Waste

Bangkok/Beijing, 1 September 2006- A project to curb illegal trade in ozone depleting substances (ODS) and dangerous waste in the Asia Pacific region went into operation today. "Project Sky Hole Patching" is designed to monitor the movement of suspicious shipments of ozone depleting chemicals and dangerous commodities across several customs territories in the region. It involves customs administrations and environment authorities, the World Customs Organisation's Regional Intelligence Liaison Office for Asia and the Pacific (RILO A/P), United Nations Environment Programme Regional Office for Asia and Pacific (UNEP ROAP), the Compliance Assistance Programme (CAP) of UNEP's Division of Technology, Industry and Economics, Basel Convention Regional Centers and other key international organizations.

"It is encouraging that customs administrations in the region are prioritizing environmental issues in their agenda. This project will undoubtedly curb smuggling of environmentally sensitive commodities and also facilitate the cooperation between customs authorities and environmental agencies," said Dr. Sathit Limpongpan, Director General of the Department of Thai Customs. "It is obvious that Customs is a forefront agency and key stakeholder in fighting against the illegal trade of ozone depleting substances."

While global efforts under the Montreal Protocol have reduced the production and consumption of ODS by 90%, the ozone layer remains fragile and under threat. The ozone hole that formed in the southern hemisphere in 2005 was the third largest ozone hole ever recorded, peaking at a maximum area of 25 million square kilometers. A recent report released by UNEP and the World Meteorological Organization indicates that ozone layer recovery will be delayed by 5-15 years, depending on latitude. By fully meeting their commitments to phase out ODS – including control of cross border trade in these chemicals – Governments can help avoid further delays in this healing process, the report said?

The approaching deadlines to phase-out ODS and dwindling legal supplies are leading to rise in ODS prices, creating lucrative business opportunities for illegal operators. While it is very difficult to give an accurate estimate of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) smuggled in developing countries, there are indications of high incidence of illegal trade. Illegal ODS has been seized in China, India, Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and other countries in the region. For example, in 2005, 88,291 kgs, of ozone-depleting substances were seized in Thailand, up 6,997 kgs from 2004.

"Illegal ODS trade, if left unchecked, could undermine global efforts to phase out these chemicals. The coming years will thus be important as developing countries phase-out their consumption of major ODS to achieve compliance with the Montreal Protocol," said Surendra Shrestha, UNEP Regional Director and Representative for Asia and the Pacific.

Moreover, it is estimated that some 300–500 million tons of hazardous waste are

produced annually. As regulations governing the safe and proper disposal of hazardous waste tighten, increasing handling charges and decreasing safe disposal capacity, much of the waste is suspected to be dumped illegally.

During the 11th World Customs Organization Asia Pacific Regional Conference of Heads of Customs Administrations held in Beijing on 3-6 April 2006, the meeting unanimously agreed to initiate "Project Sky-Hole-Patching". A proposed plan of action of the project was adopted during the 4th Joint Southeast Asia and Pacific/South Asia Customs-ODS Officers Cooperation Workshop held in Bangkok on May 17-20 2006.

The operation will be conducted in two phases with the first six-month phase focussing on ODS. The second phase will include hazardous waste. RILO A/P and UNEP ROAP CAP will facilitate the operation for the region in consultation with involved regional and international institutions dealing with ODS and dangerous waste.

For more information, please contact:

Ms. Satwant Kaur, UNEP Regional Information Officer, Tel: + (66 2) 288 2127; E-mail: kaur@un.org

Mr. Atul Bagai, Regional Network Coordinator, South Asia, UNEP CAP, ROAP, Tel: 662 288 1662, Email: bagai@un.org

UNEP Division of Technology, Industry and Economics' OzonAction Programme:
<http://www.unep.fr/ozonaction/>

Green Customs Initiative: <http://www.greencustoms.org>

