



United Nations Environment Programme

برنامج الأمم المتحدة للبيئة · 联合国环境规划署
PROGRAMME DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT · PROGRAMA DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS PARA EL MEDIO AMBIENTE
ПРОГРАММА ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫХ НАЦИЙ ПО ОКРУЖАЮЩЕЙ СРЕДЕ

PRESS RELEASE

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Reducing the health risks for children from ozone layer depletion

New Ozone Education Pack Targets Primary Schools

Nairobi/New Delhi/Santiago, 15 September 2006 – Looking at your shadow (the shorter it is, the more dangerous UV radiation is¹), and covering up with hats, sunglasses and sunscreen, are among the practical tips for children contained in a new guide on the ozone layer for primary school teachers.

The *OzonAction Education Pack*, launched globally today in English, French and Spanish, contains an entire teaching and learning programme, based on basic knowledge, practical skills and participation, to enable children to learn about simple solutions to protect the ozone layer and safely enjoy the sun.

"While we have hope that the atmosphere is healing and that the Montreal Protocol is working, we are still facing serious challenges," said Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). "Children should be aware of the huge risks that a weakened ozone layer poses to human health and the environment and they must know that much remains to be done. We must give them the means to protect their own future, and education is certainly key in this regard," he said.

The pack, produced jointly by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO), has been released to coincide with the International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer on 16th of September. This year's theme is "Protect the Ozone Layer, Save Life on Earth".

"The *OzonAction Education Pack* will help schoolchildren to become aware of the simple protection steps that reduce solar UV health risks, and these become even more important as ozone layer depletion leads to intensified UV radiation on Earth," said Dr Anders Nordström, Acting Director-General of WHO. "The severe health effects such as melanoma and other skin cancers are largely preventable through reduced sun exposure. UV protection thus becomes an important component of the global efforts towards cancer prevention."

¹ When the sun is high in the sky, your shadow is short signaling high UV intensity - whilst if the sun shines from the side, your shadow is longer and UV radiation less intense.

The ozone layer plays a crucial role in the protection of life on Earth from harmful effects of ultraviolet radiation. While some solar UV radiation is necessary for bone health and also may help to prevent certain chronic diseases, excessive sun exposure causes immediate and long-term health problems.

Sunburn - which can be severe and blistering - is an acute health problem, while skin cancer and cataract leading to blindness are the most severe long-term health effects. WHO estimates that about 1.5 million DALYs are lost every year due to excessive solar UV radiation (see www.who.int/uv). One DALY is equivalent to one lost year of life in full health.

The *OzonAction Education Pack* is also linked to the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, which is led by UNESCO.

“The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) aims to integrate the values inherent in sustainable development into all aspects of learning to encourage changes in behaviour which will enable a more viable and fairer society for everyone,” said Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO. “During this Decade, education for sustainable development will help to make citizens better prepared to face the challenges of the present and the future, and to orient decision-makers in their efforts to create a viable world.”

UNEP, UNESCO and WHO are jointly promoting the *OzonAction Education Pack* to countries around the world and encouraging Environment, Education and Health Ministries, schools and teachers to adopt it as part of the primary school curriculum.

The signing of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer on 16 September 1987 is now celebrated every year as the International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer.

The development of the *Education Pack* was led by the OzonAction Branch in UNEP’s Division of Technology, Industry and Economics and it was financially supported by the Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol.

Note to journalists: For more information, including resources and ideas for celebrating International Ozone Day, see: <http://www.unep.org/ozone/> or <http://www.unep.fr/ozonaction/events/ozoneday/2006.htm>

As one of the four Implementing Agencies of the Montreal Protocol’s Multilateral Fund, UNEP through its OzonAction Programme assists developing countries and countries with economies in transition to achieve and sustain compliance with this treaty. Information about the Programme, including electronic copies of the OzonAction Education Pack, can be downloaded from <http://www.unep.fr/ozonaction> (hardcopies are available from mugure.ursulet@unep.fr).

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