

Paper to be in 'Short Supply' at International Ozone Gathering

Qatar and UN Pave Way for Environmentally-Friendly, Paper-Free Events

20th Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol and 8th Conference of the Parties to the Vienna Convention

Doha/Nairobi, 16 November 2008 - Paper-free or near paperless conferences may soon be in sight under a pioneering initiative by the Government of Qatar and the UN Environment Programme(UNEP), it was announced today.

Delegates attending an international conference on the protection of the ozone layer are being issued with laptops and given lessons on how to minimize paper in terms of documents, reports and publications.

Special software is being utilized which will allow delegates to share and amend papers during the six day meeting taking place in the Qatari capital Doha.

The initiative is also expected to save greenhouse gas emissions linked with the shipment of conference documents and publications to and from meetings.

Key Issues at the Conference

The pilot comes as delegates from over 150 countries are meeting under the Montreal Protocol and Vienna Convention on substances that deplete the ozone layer.

- Issues before delegates include destruction of ozone damaging substances held in items such as fridges, fire-fighting equipment and foams.

Many of these banked ozone-damaging chemicals have climate change impacts too. Large amount could, without action, be released as early as 2015.

This could lead to the equivalent of several billion tonnes of CO₂ being pumped into the atmosphere.

- Countries will also discuss the sixth replenishment of the Multilateral Fund- which has so far spent over \$2 billion on assisting developing countries to phase out ozone-killing chemicals and switch to less harmful ones.

Countries are likely to discuss a range of replenishment figures from around \$338 million to close to \$630 million to cover the coming years including the costs of accelerating the freeze and phase-out of HCFCs-chemicals that can damage the ozone layer but are now also known to contribute to global warming too.

A significant agreement to the accelerated freeze and phase-out was made at the last meeting off the Montreal Protocol held in the Canadian city from where the treaty takes its name.

- Countries will again be seeking exemptions for a chemical known as methyl bromide used for fumigating soils against crop-damaging pests. However, the quantities of exemptions being sought are down by around 70 per cent from a few years ago.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director, said: "The Montreal Protocol and the Vienna Convention are among the outstanding examples of international cooperation on the environment. They have lead to a dramatic reduction in the production and consumption of chemicals that deplete the ozone layer-that thin layer of high flying gas that protects all life on Earth from deadly levels of ultra violet rays".

"This week in Doha governments need to keep that momentum up including the necessary levels of funding needed to complete this important work including the challenge but also the opportunity presented for both ozone and climate from the accelerated freeze and phase-out of HCFCs," he said.

Mr Steiner said the paperless conference concept would be another welcome and practical outcome of the meeting.

"Tens of millions of tones of CO₂, the principle greenhouse gas, are released as a result of the manufacture, printing and shipping of paper in the form of documents, publications and books. The UN and its numerous meetings are no exception," he said.

"I would like to thank the Government of Qatar for backing this inspiring idea and look forward to taking the concept forward-if we are successful it could become a blue print across the UN and who knows, perhaps one day we could witness a near paperless or paper-free General Assembly in New York," said Mr Steiner.

Waleed Al-Emadi, a senior ozone expert at the Qatar Ministry of the Environment, said: "In the United States alone there have been estimates that a 10 per cent reduction in the use of paper in offices could cut greenhouse gas emissions by 1.6 billion tones".

"Less printing also means less ink, less use of heavy metals such as cadmium and less use of electricity. Imagine the environmental improvements around the world if paperless or near paper less meetings and conferences can be part of daily life."

Paper-free UNEP Governing Council

The pilot is expected to lead to an even bigger trial when the world's environment ministers meet in Nairobi, Kenya in February next year at the headquarters of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

The Qatar Ministry of the Environment is planning to donate a large quantity of laptops complete with the special software while dispatching IT experts to make UNEP's Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum as paper-free as possible.

Many delegates attending conferences also bring and return home with large quantities of books and reports.

A study by UNEP on climate neutrality, released in June this year to mark World Environment Day 2008, estimated that if every air passenger reduced their luggage and carry on items by 20 Kg it could reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by two million tones a year.

UNEP's exhibition in Doha will also be paperless and sport the banner 'Are You looking for a UNEP Publication? We Left it At Home!'.

In order to get delegates on the paperless path, UNEP will be handing out memory sticks and guides on how to download publications while outlining the greenhouse gas emissions saved by not carting loads of documents back home.

Notes to Editors

The 20th Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol is taking place at the Sheraton Doha Conference and Convention Centre.

Documents can be accessed at ozone.unep.org

For More Information Please Contact Nick Nuttall, UNEP Spokesperson/Head of Media, on Tel: +41 795 96 57 37, or E-mail: nick.nuttall@unep.org

Maria Soldanha, Communications and Information Officer, Tel: +974 678 1502, or E-mail: maria.soldanha@unep.org

