

Last ozone-destroying chemicals to be phased out

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One of the last major ozone-destroying chemicals looks set to be phased out by the signatory countries of the [Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer](#).

The imminent deal could be as good for the climate as for ozone, and could mark a turnaround in US willingness to use the international treaty system to deal with climate-related issues.

The meeting in Montreal of the 191 member countries marks the 20th anniversary of the protocol, which phases out various chemicals that deplete stratospheric ozone. The main item of business was the [phase-out of hydrochlorofluorocarbon-22 \(HCFC-22\)](#).

The substance is [kinder to ozone than the chlorofluorocarbons \(CFCs\)](#) used in aerosol sprays and refrigerants which it replaced, but it too destroys ozone – and is also a greenhouse gas.

HCFCs were supposed to be phased out by 2040 under the Montreal Protocol, but its production has soared in recent years as prosperity and the demand for air conditioning has skyrocketed in countries like India and China. [Scientific assessments earlier in 2007](#) (pdf) concluded that the ozone would recover years earlier if HCFCs were abandoned before the deadline above – and the subsequent reduction in greenhouse gases could be substantially more than that called for by the Kyoto protocol on climate.

Stringent measures

The meeting in Montreal started out with various proposals for freezing HCFC production in 2011 or 2016 (at 2010 or 2015 levels), followed by intermediate reductions until phase-out in either 2030 or 2040. Bickering over the details went on behind closed doors late into Thursday night.

But now **New Scientist** understands from sources in Montreal that the deal will tend towards more stringent proposals: freezing HCFC production and consumption in 2012, at an average of its levels between 2009 and 2011. Then production must be cut 70% by 2025, with a final phase-out in 2030.

It is not clear whether that will be formally agreed by the end of meetings on Friday, or whether details will be finalised at another meeting in six months, but delegates considered the outline unlikely to change substantially.

Alexander von Bismarck of the Environmental Investigation Agency, a pressure group based in Washington, DC, US, says producers are now likely to ramp up the production of another HCFC-22 so the levels are as high as possible when the freeze comes in. But the protocol's signatory countries may soon agree on language to limit this too – and possibly for HCFC replacements to be climate, as well as ozone, friendly.

The US had previously opposed combining climate and ozone measures in any agreement – but another possible replacement for HCFC-22, the HFCs, are powerful greenhouse gases. "It's very gratifying," von Bismarck told **New Scientist**, "that the international community, including the US and China, seem ready to grasp this opportunity to protect both the climate and the ozone layer."