

## Answer to hot air was in fact a chilling blunder

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AMID talk of offsetting the hefty carbon footprint of the United Nations climate conference in Bali, organisers missed a large elephant in the room.

The air-conditioning system installed to keep more than 10,000 delegates cool used highly damaging refrigerant gases - as lethal to the atmosphere as 48,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide, and nearly the equivalent of the emissions of all aircraft used to fly delegates to Indonesia.

With hawk-eyed representatives of more than 100 green organisations present, it was probably the worst place in the world to commit an environmental faux pas.

Staff from Australia's Natural Refrigerants Transition Board and the London- and Washington-based Environmental Investigation Agency noticed the stockpiled cylinders of hydrochlorofluorocarbons - a refrigerant likely to be phased out over the next few years because it devours ozone in the upper atmosphere.

In addition, the refrigerant is a potent greenhouse gas, with each kilogram at least as damaging as 1.7 tonnes of carbon dioxide.

Investigators at the Balinese resort complex at Nusa Dua counted 700 cylinders of the gas, each of them weighing 13.5 kilograms, and the system was visibly leaking.

The air-conditioning system, which used two kilometres of plastic pipe, serviced the European pavilion, the UN Secretariat offices, the media centre and other temporary areas.

After a fortnight of discussions with its Indonesian hosts and the contractors who installed the air-conditioning, the investigation agency proposed sending experts to safely recover the HCFC emissions by storing the refrigerant gas in sealed containers.

Australian officials were contacted and offered to help. The information was also sent to the staff of the former US vice-president Al Gore, and Yvo de Boer, the executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

By Friday the Indonesian Department of Environment decided to commit its own staff to a careful clean-up.