



PRESS RELEASE

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Ozone-Friendly Replacement Gases Will Be Disastrous For Global Warming, Warn Experts

WASHINGTON, DC - THE RECENT decision to accelerate the phase-out of hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) – air conditioning and refrigeration gases – will in fact vastly undermine efforts to reduce global warming if proper precautions are not taken, the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) warned today.

As parties meet this week in Bangkok under the Montreal Protocol to discuss ways to reduce demand for HCFCs in developing countries, EIA has highlighted the urgent need to promote climate-friendly alternatives.

The problem is that the chemicals being marketed as the dominant replacements to ozone-layer-depleting HCFCs are HFCs (hydrofluorocarbons). These man-made gases may be benign to the ozone layer, but they are extremely potent greenhouse gases – often more so than the HCFCs they are set to replace.

Their use in both developed and developing countries is rising quickly, and emissions from HFCs are expected to reach at least 1.2 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2015. That is about 10% of total Kyoto Protocol savings between its 1990 baseline and 2012 reduction targets.

“Although the decision to speed up the phasing out of HCFCs was truly something to celebrate, it may leave the climate worse off unless warnings are heeded,” said EIA’s Global Environment Campaigner Fionnuala Walravens.

The decision to bring forward the phase-out of HCFCs, made by the Montreal Protocol last September, could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by up to 16 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2040 – with the majority of savings achieved in developing countries.

“But these enormous climate benefits stand to be lost unless decisive action is taken to ensure that climate-friendly alternatives to HCFCs are adopted,” added Walravens.

Many countries are finally beginning to recognize the need to limit the use of these greenhouse gases. Last year the European Commission issued a directive to prevent the

use of high global warming potential HFCs in car air-conditioning produced from 2011. HFCs are regulated by the Kyoto Protocol, but their use continues to grow.

“Although the Montreal Protocol’s official remit does not include climate savings, it is clear that this Protocol has been very effective at mitigating climate change and is able to do much more. It makes sense for these two landmark pieces of environmental law to support rather than undermine each other. Using the Montreal Protocol to benefit the climate is currently the most cost-effective tool in terms of refrigerant gases.”

There are alternatives to HFCs that do not contribute to global warming – so-called natural refrigerants such as ammonia and hydrocarbons; unlike HFCs, they are not man made and exist in nature. Similarly yet ironically, naturally existing carbon dioxide can be used as a climate-neutral refrigerant instead of man-made chemicals that have extremely high global warming potential.

EIA is calling for nations at the Montreal Protocol summit to commit extra funds to ensure the rapid uptake of climate-friendly alternatives in developing countries.

The Montreal Protocol should ensure that it does not undermine the Kyoto Protocol by funding the uptake of global warming HFCs as replacements to ozone-layer-depleting gases. If these global warming gases become established in developing countries, their emissions will increase just at a time when global efforts are being made to decrease greenhouse gases.

Notes

HFCs are used as refrigerants and foam blowing agents. Their most common use is in car air conditioning (half the market in 2002). But as ozone-layer-depleting substances are phased out, their use in other sectors is growing. In 2002, over a quarter of the market supplied the commercial sector. This is bad news for the climate, as the HFCs commonly used in this sector can be up to twice as potent as the HCFCs they replace in terms of their global warming potential.

The Montreal Protocol has not only promoted the recovering of the ozone layer, but has accrued climate benefits of over 100 billion metric tons CO₂-eq at a cost of just over \$0.02 (USD) per metric ton CO₂-eq.

In 2007, EIA was presented with two awards by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Montreal Protocol for its undercover work exposing and closing down illicit international trade in chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).

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Further information on the Environmental Investigation Agency, global warming and depletion of the ozone layer is available at: www.eia-global.org and www.eia-international.org