

## **Central America launches two national pilot projects to speed safe destruction of ozone-depleting substances and persistent organic pollutants**

Basel Convention Regional Center for Central America and Mexico (BCRC – CAM), Cartagena de Indias, Colombia (21 October 2011) – Destroying large banks of ozone-depleting substances (ODS), harmful to the earth's atmosphere, together with persistent organic pollutants (POPs), damaging to human health and the environment, are the twin aims of a unique regional partnership launched today in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia. This initiative is supported financially by Norway and Switzerland.

Central American leaders coordinating destruction of ozone-depleting substances and persistent organic pollutants announced two national pilot projects to help meet the challenge of collecting and destroying mounting stocks of chemicals and wastes in the region, on the closing day of the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention.

The Central American initiative will start with the above mentioned two national pilot destruction projects and then expand into other four Central American countries, collecting and destroying ODS and POPs and reducing ODS emissions, which could damage the ozone layer and increase climate change, while at the same time cleaning up POPs. Thus, six Central American countries will be cleaned of these substances: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama, based on the feasibility assessment which is currently under preparation. It will evaluate conditions for possible coordination with other POPs disposal procedures.

Cost analysis studies will be carried out to ensure that the collection, transportation and destruction can take place in an economical, as well as in an environmentally sound manner, according to procedures approved under the Montreal Protocol on Protection of the Ozone Layer, the Basel Convention on Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. This initiative will provide free-of-charge technical and financial support for the environmentally sound destruction of ODS and POPs to motivate holders of these substances to stop releasing them to the environment.

“To overcome the difficulties faced by Parties in the identification of ODS banks for destruction and then ensure the ultimate destruction of these harmful substances, countries need new approaches. This groundbreaking project may set a precedent for future initiatives,” said Marco Gonzalez, Executive Secretary of the Vienna Convention and Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

“Having a joint approach to ODS and POPs destruction provides a highly cost-effective model which can be shared and replicated in other regions,” said Jim Willis, Executive Secretary of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions. “By promoting synergies between three international treaties and regional and national partners, the project will deliver concrete benefits to the economic and environmental health of the region and the globe,” he concluded.

Miguel Araujo, Director of the Basel Convention Regional Centre for Central America and Mexico (BCRC-CAM) and leader of the initiative, said “The Basel Convention and national regulations intended to discourage undesirable shipments of chemical substances and wastes also may be perceived as inhibiting the desirable shipment of ODS and POPs to responsible destruction facilities in a variety of countries.”

“The solution is to find ways to encourage, finance, and streamline shipment of ODS and POPs to safe destruction without opening loopholes that would allow the unsafe or undesirable shipment of other toxic and hazardous substances and wastes,” Mr. Araujo said.

Experts from three multilateral environmental agreements – the 1985 Vienna Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer and its 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, the 1989 Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, and the 2001 Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants – have joined in support of the initiative.

The initiative sets an example of synergies between the multilateral environmental agreements and regional and national actors. It will encourage national coordination efforts and help reduce costs of implementation of the treaties by preventing duplication of work.

Initiative organizers underscore the urgency and relevance of this effort, given the higher cost effectiveness of a coordinated ODS and POPs destruction, current delays in preparing ODS inventories and facilities that can destroy ODS banks in the Central American region.

The initiative results can also be replicated in other regions of the world.

## **Note to editors**

### **Initiative “Coordinated Destruction of ODS and POPs Banks in Central America”**

The initiative is organized and managed by the Basel Convention Regional Centre for Central America and Mexico (Centro Regional del Convenio de Basilea para Centroamérica y México, BCRC-CAM) in El Salvador.

The initiative is supported by the Norwegian Ministry of the Environment and the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment, with special technical support provided by the Netherlands Ministry of Defense, United States Department of Defense, the United States Environmental Protection Agency, UNEP, Refrigerant Reclaim Australia, Hortitectnia, and the National Institute for Advanced Science and Technology of Japan.

Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development is providing legal, capacity building, and networking support to identify and resolve barriers to the desirable cross-border shipment of ODS and POPS for destruction. The goal is to fully satisfy the norms of prior informed consent, while supporting sustainable solutions to chemical management.

The initiative has two components implemented by BCRC-CAM:

a) “Pilot destruction of ODS and POPs and Legal Analysis of Feasibility of Transboundary Movements within Central American countries”, financed by Norway, which will produce calibrated protocols for the destruction of ODS and POPs banks based on pilot destructions, and a legal analysis on the feasibility of intraregional transboundary movements of ODS and POPs. It seeks the use of existing capacities for the destruction of ODS that are not currently available in many Central American countries. In turn, the new Central American initiative will provide information on existing ODS and POPs banks and alternate technologies and costs for their destruction.

b) “Feasibility Assessment and Preparation of National Destruction Plans of ODS and POPs for six Central American Countries (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama)”, financed by Switzerland. It includes cost estimates of collection, transportation and destruction of ODS and POPs banks,

The initiative will seek synergies with related efforts in the region (e.g. Reduction of Chemical Runoff in Agriculture and Tourism (REPCAR II), remediation activities in coordination with the BlackSmith Institute).

### **The three multilateral environmental conventions**

The Basel Convention was drafted and adopted when a tightening of environmental regulations in industrialized countries in the 1980s stimulated irresponsible shipping of hazardous waste to developing countries and to Eastern Europe. The Convention established a framework based on “prior informed consent,” for controlling movements of hazardous wastes across international frontiers. The Convention mandates Parties to reduce the hazardous wastes generated and promote environmentally sound management (ESM); restrict transboundary movements of wastes except where these agree with ESM principles and ensure ESM of wastes as close as possible to where they were generated.

Organized under the theme “Prevention, minimization and recovery of wastes”, the Tenth Meeting of the Conference of the Basel Convention is being held at the invitation of the Government of Colombia in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, from 17 to 21 October 2011. Eight hundred delegates and observers from over 150 countries are attending the meeting.

The Stockholm Convention is a global treaty to protect human health and the environment from chemicals that persist in the environment for long periods, become widely distributed geographically, bioaccumulate in humans or wildlife, and have adverse effects to human health or to the environment. The Convention requires Parties to take measures to eliminate or reduce the release of POPs into the environment.

The Vienna Convention and its Montreal Protocol protects the Earth against harmful ultra violet radiation by phasing out the production and consumption of nearly 100 ODS once used in over 250 industrial, military and consumer sectors. ODS were once widely used for health (medicine & sterilization), fire protection (food processing, weapons), electronics and aerospace (solvents), energy efficiency (insulating foam), food preservation (refrigeration and food freezing), comfort (air conditioning), convenience (aerosol deodorant and hairspray), and more.

## Contact

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