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North American Countries Target “Super” Greenhouse Gases Through Strengthened Ozone Treaty

Victory Would Eliminate 100 Billion Tonnes of CO₂-equivalent

Washington, DC, April 30, 2010 – Last night, the United States, Canada, and Mexico submitted a [proposal](#) to strengthen climate protection under the Montreal Protocol. The proposal targets the production and use of HFCs, a group of “super” greenhouse gases.

If accepted by the other Montreal Protocol Parties, the proposal would deliver climate mitigation equivalent to preventing over 100 billion tonnes of CO₂ emissions. This is 10 to 20 times the mitigation under the Kyoto Protocol’s first commitment period (see [graph](#)) assuming full compliance.

The Federated States of Micronesia submitted a similar [proposal](#) on HFCs last night as well. This is the fourth year in a row the tiny island nation has lead efforts to strengthen climate protection under the Montreal Protocol.

“HFCs are a big target that can be eliminated through the world’s best environmental treaty, and at a very low cost—maybe \$4 billion,” said Durwood Zaelke, President of the Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development. “The North American Parties know that eliminating one of the six Kyoto gases will give us the fast mitigation we need to avoid passing tipping points for abrupt and potentially catastrophic climate impacts,” he added. “That would be one down, and five to go. But first we need to bring the rest of the Parties on board.”

The Montreal Protocol has already phased out nearly 100 dangerous gases and chemicals, reducing climate emissions by up to 222 billion tonnes of CO₂-eq. and delaying climate change by up to 12 years. Because HFCs have the same uses as earlier chemicals controlled by the Montreal Protocol, the treaty is ideally equipped to ensure a cost-effective, efficient, and orderly phase-down of HFCs. HFC emissions controlled under the Kyoto Protocol would *not* be affected by either the North American or Micronesia proposal.

“We appreciate the leadership shown by the North American countries,” said Ambassador Masao Nakayama, Micronesia’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations. “A fast HFC phase-down could buy a decade of delay in equivalent CO₂ emissions and give the world the time we need to phase down all other greenhouse gases.”

The phase-down of HFCs under the Montreal Protocol is essential for achieving the science-

based goal of over 100 countries to reduce atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases to 350 ppm and limit temperature increases to a global average of 1.5°C. For low-lying islands and other vulnerable countries, “failure to achieve these goals will threaten our homes, way of life, and, in some cases, our very existence,” said Ambassador Nakayama.

“Uncontrolled growth of HFCs will offset the benefits of reducing carbon dioxide,” said Zaelke. “The only way we can gain ground is by phasing down HFCs and other non-CO₂ greenhouse gases and aerosols, along with aggressive CO₂ cuts.”

More than 40 Parties expressed their support for taking action on HFCs by joining a declaration by Micronesia at the last Montreal Protocol meeting in November 2009. However, a series of challenges kept the Parties from reaching consensus on the HFC proposals.

Last year, the HFC phase-down was considered premature by some Parties, who wanted to first agree on the funding for the accelerated HCFC phase-out agreed to in 2007. Earlier this month, the funding issue was resolved when guidelines were agreed upon for releasing the \$490 million for phasing out HCFCs. The decision was made by the Executive Committee of the Montreal Protocol’s funding mechanism, known as the Multilateral Fund. The Multilateral Fund also agreed to pay a 25% premium for climate benefits when phasing out HCFCs, above and beyond the ozone-only cost-effective thresholds, where the project will provide climate benefits. This provides an incentive for countries to choose energy efficient, low-global warming potential (GWP) replacements instead of high-GWP HFCs when phasing out HCFCs. This is the first time any treaty has taken this innovative approach.

This year, there is also more information available about a growing choice of alternatives for at least half of HFC use, including for mobile air conditioning, representing one-third of global HFC use, and foams, representing one-fifth of use. Companies are motivated to avoid HFCs.

Another issue last year was the insistence by some Parties that a phase-down of HFCs under the Montreal Protocol should wait for the Copenhagen climate negotiations to play out.

With many of these issues now resolved, the U.S., Canada, Mexico, and Micronesia are optimistic that the Montreal Protocol Parties will be ready to phase down HFCs this year.

“This could be the single biggest climate play this year,” added Zaelke. “Passing it up would be Planetary negligence. The U.S. has taken the first big step in the right direction, but success will require follow-through, including Presidential leadership in the run-up to the annual meeting in November.”

In addition to phasing down HFCs, the U.S. and rest of the world should also be taking action on the other short-lived climate forcers, like black carbon, methane, and tropospheric ozone. These “fast-action” strategies will be critical to avoiding the tipping points for abrupt climate change in the near-term.

“Carbon dioxide is the long-term bad guy, and rightfully deserves attention, but we won’t even have the chance to fight that battle if we ignore the near-term forcers,” said Zaelke.

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North American proposal: http://ozone.unep.org/Meeting_Documents/oewg/30oewg/Proposal-from-USA-Canada-and-Mexico-2.pdf

Federated States of Micronesia proposal:

http://www.unep.ch/ozone/Meeting_Documents/oewg/30oewg/Proposal-from-Federated-States-of-Micronesia.pdf