

Adherence to Montreal Protocol saves ozone and lives

They said it couldn't be done. Ten years ago, more than 100 nations signed the Montreal Protocol, an international agreement to phase out the use and production of ozone-depleting substances. At the time, critics said the costs were too high and that the technology simply didn't exist to replace chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and other substances known to damage the ozone layer.

Well, they were wrong. This week, delegates from more than 100 countries gathered once again in Montreal to mark the Proto-

col's tenth anniversary and to consider new proposals that will further accelerate the phase-out of ozone-depleting substances. In addition, new measures were considered to discourage illegal trade in CFCs. Even substances which were previously considered too essential to be eliminated were reviewed.

But the big news at the meeting was the release of a study entitled "The Right Choice at the Right Time" by Canada's Environment Minister, Christine Stewart. The report concluded that the

total economic benefit from the protocol will exceed \$459 billion by the middle of the next century. By contrast, the overall costs of implementation are not expected to exceed

\$235 billion. Financial benefits of the protocol are based on an estimate of avoided health costs and environmental degradation.

"The bottom line in this study is that the Montreal Protocol was the right choice 10 years ago for Canada and the global environment," said Stewart.

The report concluded that there will be 19.1 million avoided cases of non-melanoma skin cancer worldwide by 2060; about 1.5 million avoided cases of melanoma skin cancer; 333,500 avoided skin cancer deaths; and, about 129 million avoided cases of cataracts. In addition, there will be a significant reduction in illness and deaths from infectious diseases.

Aquatic ecosystems are particularly vulnerable to the effects of UV-B radiation. As a result of the protocol, a healthier ozone layer will benefit the world's fisheries by an estimated \$235 billion from 1987 to 2060. The global agricultural community will also benefit by an estimated \$191 billion from the protocol.

Both plastics and paints are affected by UV-B radiation. The study estimates benefits for polyvinyl chloride (PVC) products used in the building industry alone at \$30 billion.

At the time of the signing of the Montreal Protocol, the industrial sector was concerned that the costs of finding alternatives to CFCs would be prohibitive. In actuality, the protocol was the impetus for technological innovation that has benefitted several industries. The switch away from CFC-based propellants for aerosols has actually cut material costs by 80 per cent.

The estimated cost of eliminating CFC-based solvents was reduced by both conservation and recycling. The protocol's success in phasing out CFCs has served as an impetus for eliminating other damaging substances such as methyl bromide.

More importantly, the protocol has proven that measurable environmental impacts can be achieved through global co-operation, without sacrificing the economy. It can only be hoped that when world leaders meet next month in Kyoto, Japan, to address the issue of global warming, they will be inspired by the success of the Montreal Protocol. To date the world has failed to meet the carbon dioxide reduction targets set at the Earth Summit in 1992.



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