



PRESS BACKGROUNDER

Basic facts and data on the science and politics of ozone protection

1. The Ozone Layer

Ozone molecules (O₃) consist of three oxygen atoms. This poisonous gas is extremely rare in the atmosphere, representing just three out of every 10 million molecules. Ninety per cent of ozone exists in the upper atmosphere, or stratosphere, between 10 and 50 km (6-30 miles) above the earth. Ozone at ground-level, at the bottom of the troposphere, is a harmful pollutant resulting from automobile exhausts and other sources.

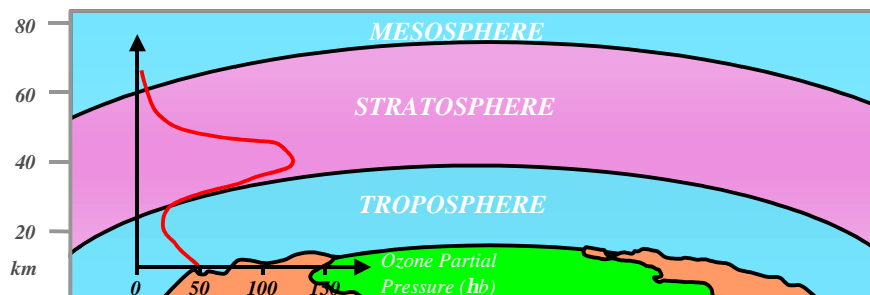


Figure 1 - Ozone Distribution in the Atmosphere

The ozone layer absorbs most of the harmful ultraviolet-B radiation from the sun. It also completely screens out lethal UV-C radiation. The ozone shield is thus essential to life as we know it. Depleting the ozone layer allows more UV-B to reach the earth. More UV-B means more melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancers, more eye cataracts, weakened immune systems, reduced plant yields, damage to ocean eco-systems and reduced fishing yields, adverse effects on animals, and more damage to plastics.

Scientific concern started in 1970 when Prof. Paul Crutzen pointed out the possibility that nitrogen oxides from fertilizers and supersonic aircraft might deplete the ozone layer. In 1974, Professors F. Sherwood Rowland and Mario J. Molina recognized that when CFCs finally break apart in the atmosphere and release chlorine atoms they cause ozone depletion. Bromine atoms released by Halons have the same effect. The three scientists received the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1995 for their pioneering work.

The ozone layer over the Antarctic has steadily weakened since measurements started in the early 1980s. The problem is worst over this part of the globe due to the extremely cold atmosphere and the presence of polar stratospheric clouds. The land area under the ozone-depleted atmosphere increased steadily to more than 20 million sq km in the early 1990s and has varied between 20 and 25 million sq km since then. In the Antarctic spring (August to November) of 1998, the area of the ozone hole exceeded 26 million square kilometers, more than 2½ times the area of Europe, and covered some populated areas of the Southern hemisphere. Total ozone dropped to about 97 Dobson Units (DU) on 1 October 1998, the lowest value recorded at the South Pole with the exception of the value of 86 DU of 12 October 1993. While no

hole has appeared elsewhere, the Arctic spring has seen the ozone layer over the North Pole thin by up to 30%, while the depletion over Europe and other high latitudes varies between 5% and 30%.

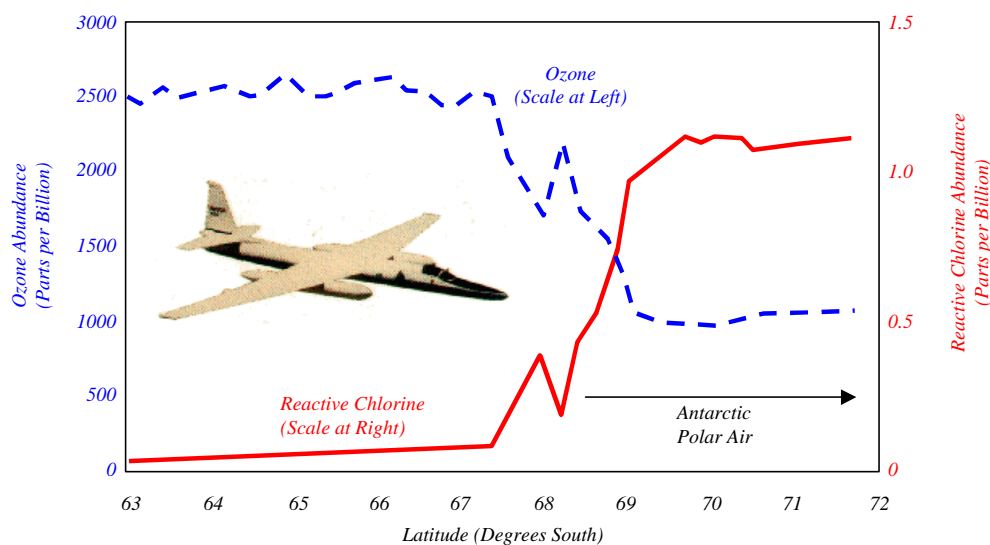


Figure 2 - Measurements of Ozone and Reactive Chlorine from a Flight Into the Antarctic Ozone Hole, 1987

2. Adopting and Ratifying the Vienna Convention and its Montreal Protocol

The issue of ozone depletion was first discussed by the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 1976. A meeting of experts on the ozone layer was convened in 1977, after which UNEP and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) set up the Coordinating Committee of the Ozone Layer (CCOL) to periodically assess ozone depletion. Inter-governmental negotiations for an international agreement to phase out ozone-depleting substances started in 1981 and concluded with the adoption of the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer in March 1985.

The 1985 Vienna Convention encourages intergovernmental cooperation on research, systematic observation of the ozone layer, monitoring of CFC production, and the exchange of information. The Convention commits its Parties to take general measures to protect human health and the environment against human activities that modify the ozone layer. The Vienna Convention is a framework agreement and does not contain legally binding controls or targets.

The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer was adopted in September 1987. Following the discovery of the Antarctic ozone hole in late 1985, governments recognized the need for stronger measures to reduce the production and consumption of a number of CFCs (CFC-11, 12, 113, 114, and 115) and several Halons (1211, 1301, 2402). The Protocol was designed so that the phase-out schedules could be revised on the basis of periodic scientific and technological assessments. Following such assessments, the Protocol was adjusted to accelerate the phase-out schedules in London in 1990, Copenhagen in 1992, Vienna in 1995 and Montreal in 1997. It has also been amended to introduce other kinds of control measures and to add new controlled substances to the list; the 1990 London Amendment included additional CFCs (CFC-13, 111, 112, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217) and the two solvents (carbon tetrachloride and methyl chloroform), while the 1992 Copenhagen Amendment added methyl bromide, HBFCs, and HCFCs. The Montreal Amendment of 1997 finalized the schedules of phase-out for methyl bromide.

Governments are not legally bound until they ratify the Protocol as well as the Amendments.

Unfortunately, while most governments have ratified the Protocol, ratification of the amendments and their stronger control measures lag behind. As of 24 May 1999, the Ozone Agreements had been ratified by countries as follows:

- ❖ Vienna Convention - 169 Parties
- ❖ Montreal Protocol - 168 Parties
- ❖ London Amendment - 129 Parties
- ❖ Copenhagen Amendment - 89 Parties
- ❖ Montreal Amendment - 13 Parties

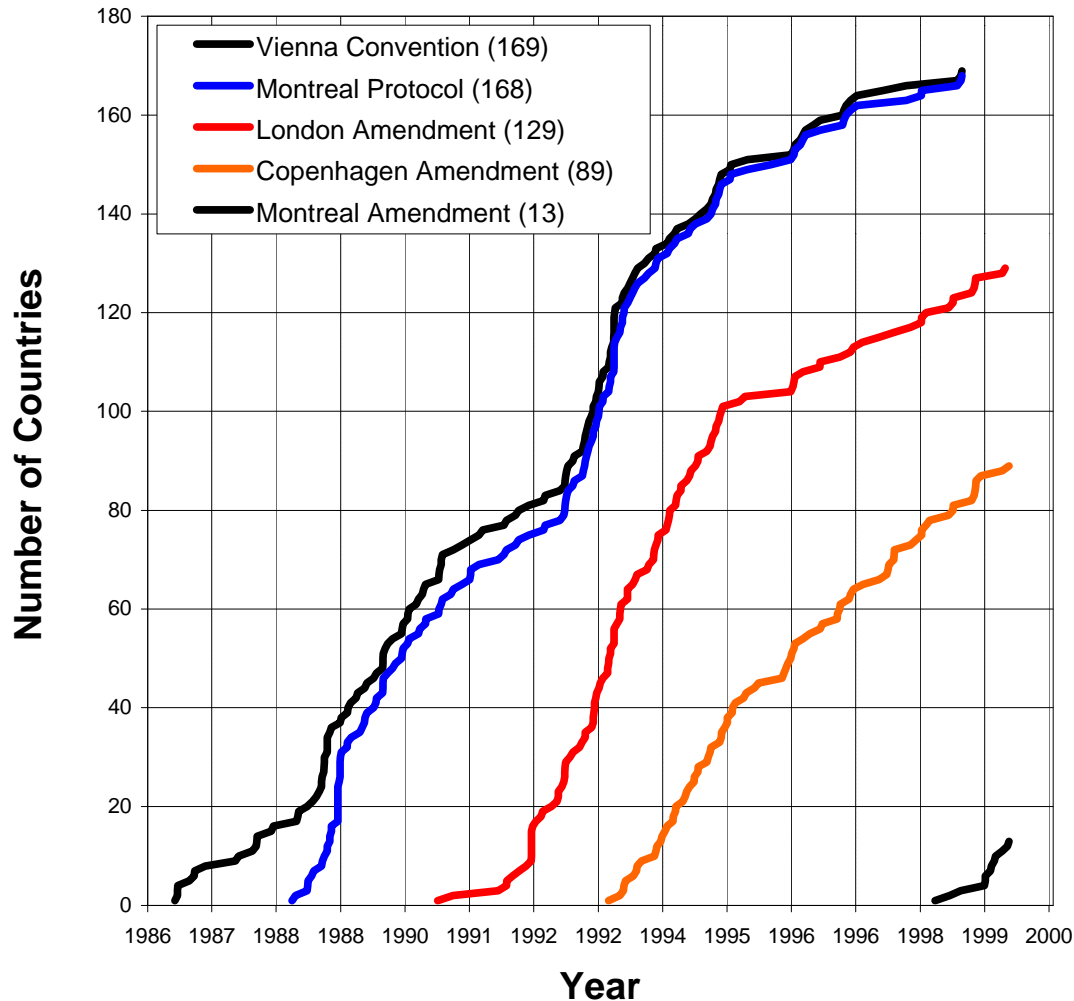


Figure 3 - Ratification Status of the Montreal Protocol and its Amendments as of 24 May, 1999.

3. The Chemicals And Their Phase-Out Schedules

Ninety-five chemicals are presently controlled by the Montreal Protocol, including:

- **Halo-carbons**, notably **chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs)** and **Halons**. CFCs were discovered in 1928 and were considered wonder gases because they are long-lived, non-toxic, non-corrosive, and non-flammable. They are also versatile and from the 1960s were increasingly used in refrigerators, air conditioners, spray cans, solvents, foams, and other applications. CFC-11 remains in the atmosphere for 50 years, CFC-12 for 102 years, and CFC-115 for 1,700. Halon 1301 is used primarily in fire extinguishers and has an atmospheric lifetime of 65 years.
- **Carbon tetrachloride** is used as a solvent and takes 42 years to break down in the atmosphere.
- **Methyl chloroform** (1,1,1-trichloroethane) is also used as a solvent and takes 5.4 years to break down.
- **Hydrobromofluorocarbons (HBFCs)** are not widely used, but they have been included under the Protocol to prevent any new uses.

- **Hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs)** were developed as the first major replacement for CFCs. While much less destructive than CFCs, HCFCs also contribute to ozone depletion. They have an atmospheric lifetime of 1.4 to 19.5 years.
- **Methyl bromide (CH₃Br)** is used as a fumigant for high-value crops, pest control, and quarantine treatment of agricultural commodities awaiting export. Total world annual consumption is about 70,000 tonnes, most of it in the industrialized countries. It takes 0.7 years to break down.

The phase-out schedules for developed countries are as follows:

- Phase out Halons by 1994;
- Phase out CFCs, carbon tetrachloride, methyl chloroform, and HBFCs by 1996;
- Reduce methyl bromide by 25% by 1999, 50% by 2001, 70% by 2003, and phase out by 2005; and
- Reduce HCFCs by 35% by 2004, 65% by 2010, 90% by 2015, and phase out by 2020 (although 0.5% is permitted for maintenance purposes only until 2030).

Developing countries have a grace period before they must start their phase-out schedules. This reflects the recognition that developed countries are responsible for the bulk of total emissions into the atmosphere and that they have more financial and technological resources for adopting replacements. The developing country schedules are as follows:

- Phase out HBFCs by 1996;
- Freeze CFCs, Halons and carbon tetrachloride at average 1995-97 levels by 1 July 1999, reduce by 50% by 2005, 85% by 2007, and phase out completely by 2010;
- Freeze methyl chloroform by 2003 at average 1998-2000 levels, reduce by 30% by 2005, 70% by 2010, and phase out by 2015;
- Freeze methyl bromide by 2002 at average 1995-98 levels, reduce by 20% by 2005, and phase out by 2015; and
- Freeze HCFCs by 2016 at 2015 levels and phase out by 2040.

The phase-out schedules cover both the production and the consumption of the target substances (except the HCFC schedules, which apply only to consumption). However, even after phase out both developed and developing countries are permitted to produce limited quantities of most substances in order to meet the basic domestic needs of developing countries. In addition, the Parties may agree on exemptions for essential uses for which no alternatives have yet been identified, e.g. the use of CFCs in metered dose inhalers for asthma. Production is defined as total production minus amounts destroyed and used as chemical feedstock and process agents. Consumption is production plus imports minus exports. Trade in recycled and used chemicals is not included in the calculation of consumption in order to encourage recovery, reclamation and recycling.

4. What Have Been The Results So Far?

Without the Protocol, by the year 2050 ozone depletion would have risen to at least 50% in the northern hemisphere's mid latitudes and 70% in the southern mid latitudes, about 10 times worse than current levels. The result would have been a doubling of UV-B radiation reaching the earth in the northern mid latitudes and a quadrupling in the south. The amount of ozone-depleting chemicals in the atmosphere would have been five times greater. The implications of this would have been horrendous: 19 million more cases of non-melanoma cancer, 1.5 million cases of melanoma cancer, and 130 million more cases of eye cataracts.

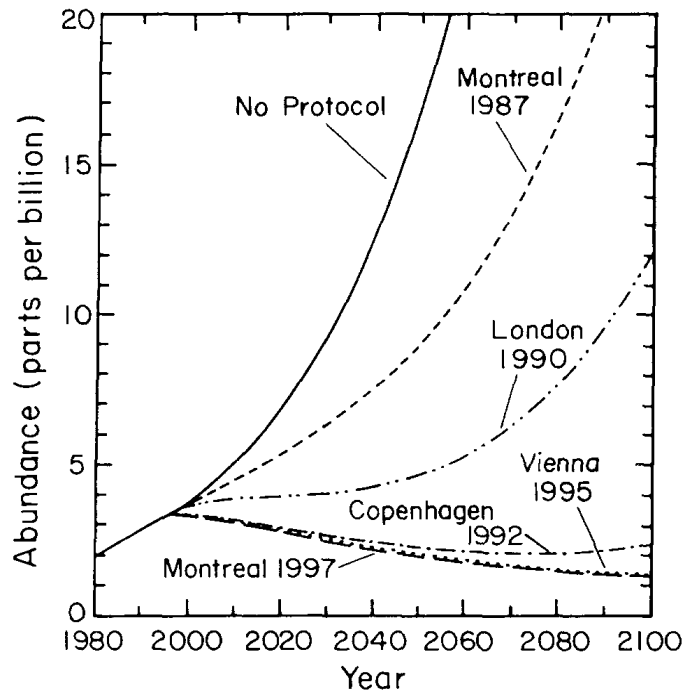


Figure 4.1 - Projection of what would have happened without the Protocol - Ozone Losses

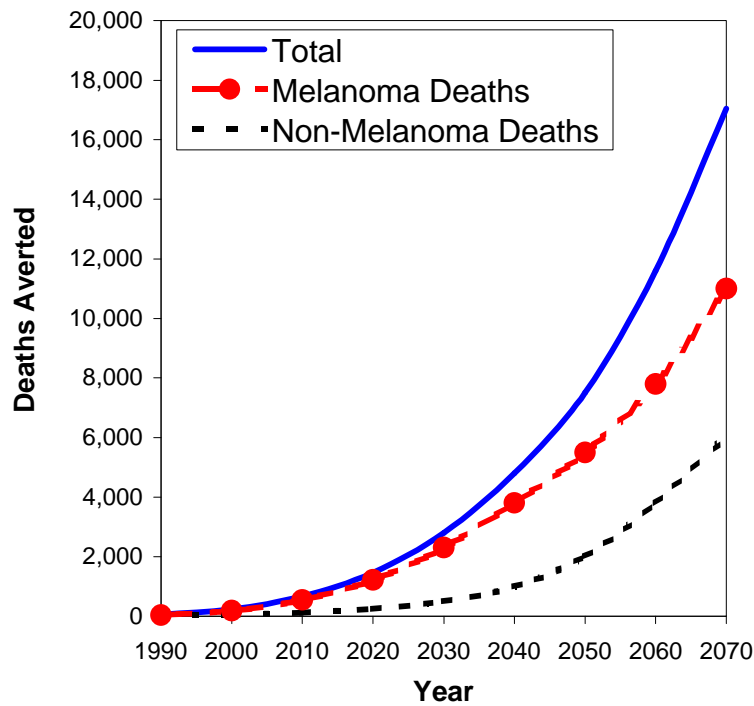


Figure 4.2 - Projections: Annual Deaths from Melanoma and Non-Melanoma Skin Cancer Averted due to the Montreal Protocol

In 1986 the total consumption of CFCs world-wide was about 1.1 million tonnes; by 1997 this had come down to about 146,000 tonnes. It has been calculated that without the Montreal Protocol global consumption would have reached about 3 million tonnes in the year 2010 and 8 million tonnes in 2060, resulting in a 50% depletion of the ozone layer by 2035. The bulk of the 1986 total, or about one million tonnes, was consumed in industrialized countries, but by 1997 these countries consumed just 23,000 tonnes (for exemptions approved by the Parties). The developing countries have increased their consumption by about 30% from 1986 to 1997. Twenty of the 126 developing countries account for more than 90% of this group's consumption, and of these 20, key countries including Argentina, Chile, the Islamic Republic of

Iran, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, and Venezuela had already started to reduce CFC consumption as of 1996.

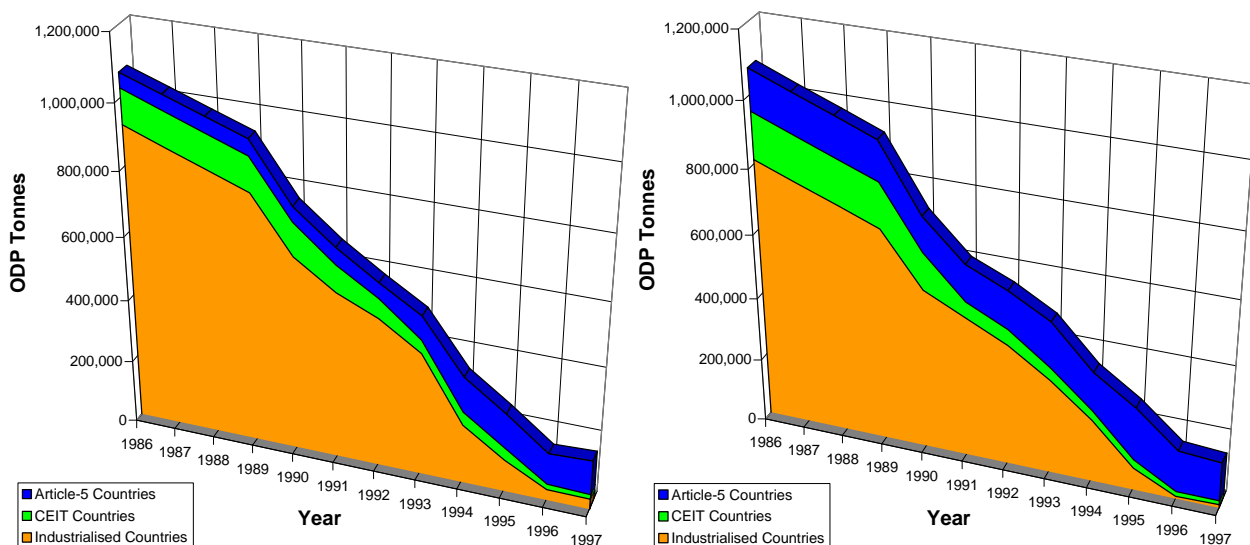


Figure 5 - Worldwide Production and Consumption of CFCs

Scientists predict that ozone depletion will reach its worst point during the next few years and then gradually decline until the ozone layer returns to normal around 2050, assuming that the Montreal Protocol is fully implemented. Despite declining CFC emissions, stratospheric concentrations are still increasing (although they are declining in the lower atmosphere) because long-lived CFCs emitted in earlier years continue to rise to the stratosphere. The atmospheric abundance of certain CFCs (notably CFC-11 and CFC-113), carbon tetrachloride, and methyl chloroform is declining. Concentrations of HCFCs and other substitutes are of course increasing.

The success of ozone protection has been possible because science and industry have been able to develop and commercialize alternatives to ozone-depleting chemicals. Developed countries ended the use of CFCs faster and with less cost than was originally anticipated. Substitutes have proved particularly important in electronics. The foam-blowing sector has made use of water, carbon-dioxide, and hydrocarbons, as well as HCFCs. The refrigeration and air-conditioning sector has largely used HCFCs as alternatives, but new equipment is increasingly using replacements with zero ozone-depleting potential, including hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), ammonia, and (in the greenfreeze refrigerator) hydrocarbons.

Consumers are recycling existing Halons to gain time for developing substitutes for fire fighting. Other extinguishing agents such as carbon dioxide, water, foam, and dry powder are now widely used. Alternative approaches, such as good fire prevention practices, use of fire-resistant materials, and appropriate designs for buildings have significantly reduced the need for Halon systems, and total phase-out was achieved smoothly by 1994.

Industrialized countries are concentrating their phase-out efforts on HCFCs and methyl bromide. They are trying to ensure that HCFCs are used only as direct replacements where other more environmentally suitable alternatives are not available. HCFCs were critical for meeting the early CFC phase-out goals but are generally considered much less important for new equipment because they do have some ozone-depleting potential.

5. A Short Summary of the Findings of the Assessment Panels

Science:

- The total abundance of ozone depleting chemicals in the lower atmosphere peaked in 1994 and is now slightly declining.

- The observed abundancies of chlorine and bromine are expected to peak in the stratosphere before the year 2000.
- The observed abundancies of substitutes to CFCs is increasing.
- The spring time Antarctic ozone hole continues unabated. In the Arctic, the late winter/spring ozone values were unusually low in six out of the last nine years.
- The understanding of the relationship between increasing UV-B radiation and decreasing column ozone has been further strengthened by observation.
- Stratospheric ozone losses have caused a cooling of the global lower stratosphere and global average negative radiation forcing of the climate system.
- The ozone layer will slowly recover over the next 50 years, given implementation of the Montreal Protocol by all the countries.
- The issues of ozone depletion and global warming are interconnected.

Environmental Effects:

- The increases in UV-B radiation associated with ozone depletion are likely to lead to adverse health effects, including skin cancers, eye cataracts and loss of immunity.
- Adverse effects have been noticed in aquatic eco-systems.
- Physical and mechanical properties of polymers are negatively affected by increase UV-B radiation.

Technology And Economic:

- CFC consumption for aerosols has come to the last 15,000 tonnes. Use of CFCs in foams has reduced by about 75%. While alternatives are available for almost all the fire fighting applications, halons are needed in a few critical uses like aviation. These uses are maintained through recycling.
- Alternatives are available for the soil fumigation use of methyl bromide. On the whole, alternatives are not available only for about 2,500 tonnes of use, out of the total use of about 72,000 tonnes of Methyl Bromide.
- HCFCs are still a valid option in refrigeration equipment.
- The HFC-134A is being widely used in some applications.
- Alternatives are available for all the solvent uses of CFCs. HCFCs are used in some of the applications.

6. The Multilateral Fund and the GEF

The Multilateral Fund is part of the financial mechanism established under the Protocol in June 1990. It pays the agreed incremental costs incurred by developing countries in phasing out their consumption and production of ozone-depleting substances. It is administered by an Executive Committee of seven developed and seven developing countries chosen by the Parties every year. The Fund's allocation was \$240 million for 1991-93, \$455 million for 1994-96, and \$465 million for 1996-99. The replenishment for the three-year period of 2000-2 will be negotiated in late 1999. The Multilateral Fund has thus far dispensed around \$903 million for projects and capacity building.

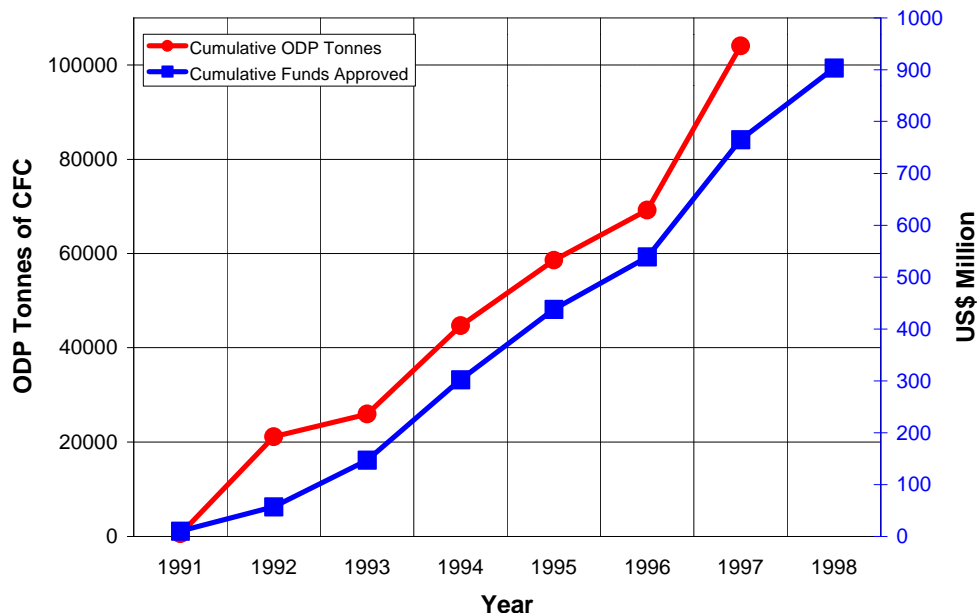


Figure 6 - Multilateral Ozone Fund: Cumulative Funds Approved and CFC Tonnes Phased Out.

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) was established by the world community to help developing countries deal with ozone depletion, climate change, biodiversity, and international waters. GEF supports projects and activities for phasing-out ozone-depleting substances in countries with economies in transition (CEIT), as these Central and East European countries are not eligible for Multilateral Fund assistance. To date, \$115 million has been approved by GEF to assist the following countries: Belarus, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, the Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine.

7. Implementing Agencies of the Multilateral Fund and GEF

UNEP, UNDP and the World Bank implement the programmes of the Fund and GEF in developing countries, and Countries with their Economies in Transition (CEIT). In addition, UNIDO functions as an implementing agency of the Fund.

UNEP is responsible for information exchange, institutional strengthening, networking and preparation of country programmes. It is assisted by over one hundred developing countries as well as countries of the former Soviet Union.

UNDP, UNIDO and the World Bank are responsible for technical assistance and investment projects to phase out ozone-depleting substances in all countries receiving assistance.

8. The Remaining Challenges

The Protocol has been hailed as an extraordinary success so far, but there is no room for complacency because:

Ratification is incomplete.

Twenty-two countries have not yet ratified the ozone treaties, and many more have not yet ratified the London, Copenhagen and Montreal Amendments.

Some countries with economies in transition (CEITs) are having difficulty complying with the Montreal Protocol.

This is due to the economic recession and political transition since 1989. The Russian Federation and a few other countries admitted in 1996 that they will be unable to follow the phase-out time-table for CFCs. They have, however, promised to complete the phase-out by the year 2000, if sufficient assistance is forthcoming.

The Parties asked the GEF to provide this assistance, and it has thus far disbursed \$115 million to these countries. In addition, the World Bank's Special Initiative raised \$19 million from Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, Sweden, UK and US to buy out the production facilities in the Russian Federation and to close them down by the year 2000.

Illegal trade has increased.

Although all new CFCs are now banned in industrialized countries, millions of CFC-dependent refrigerators, automobile air conditioners, and other equipment are still in service. Alternatives are available to service this equipment, but they can be more expensive. Recycled CFCs may be used to maintain existing equipment, but it is difficult to distinguish between new and recycled CFCs. In addition, while most consumption is forbidden, industrialized countries still produce some CFCs in order to meet their own essential uses and to supply developing countries, as permitted by the Protocol. In the US, CFCs are heavily taxed and the market price is high. As a result, some traders illegally sell perhaps 30,000 tonnes of new CFCs in the industrialized countries every year in the guise of recycled substances or as exports to developing countries. Smugglers are subject to imprisonment and heavy fines, and national licensing systems are being established to better track imports and exports.

The potential for methyl bromide to be adopted in more applications and by more countries is worrying.

Some countries imposed controls on this chemical because of its toxicity even before the concern about its ozone depletion potential first arose. However, since many countries have not yet ratified the 1992 Copenhagen Amendment which introduced controls on methyl bromide, there is a risk that consumption could spread to more countries and to more uses than at present.

Atmospheric concentrations of Halons continue to increase even though production ended in 1994.

This is because Halons in existing fire-fighting equipment get emitted whenever there is a fire. This is a concern because the bromine contained in Halons is 50 times more efficient than the chlorine in CFCs in depleting ozone. An expert panel is exploring the implications of de-commissioning existing Halons systems and destroying the Halons they contain.

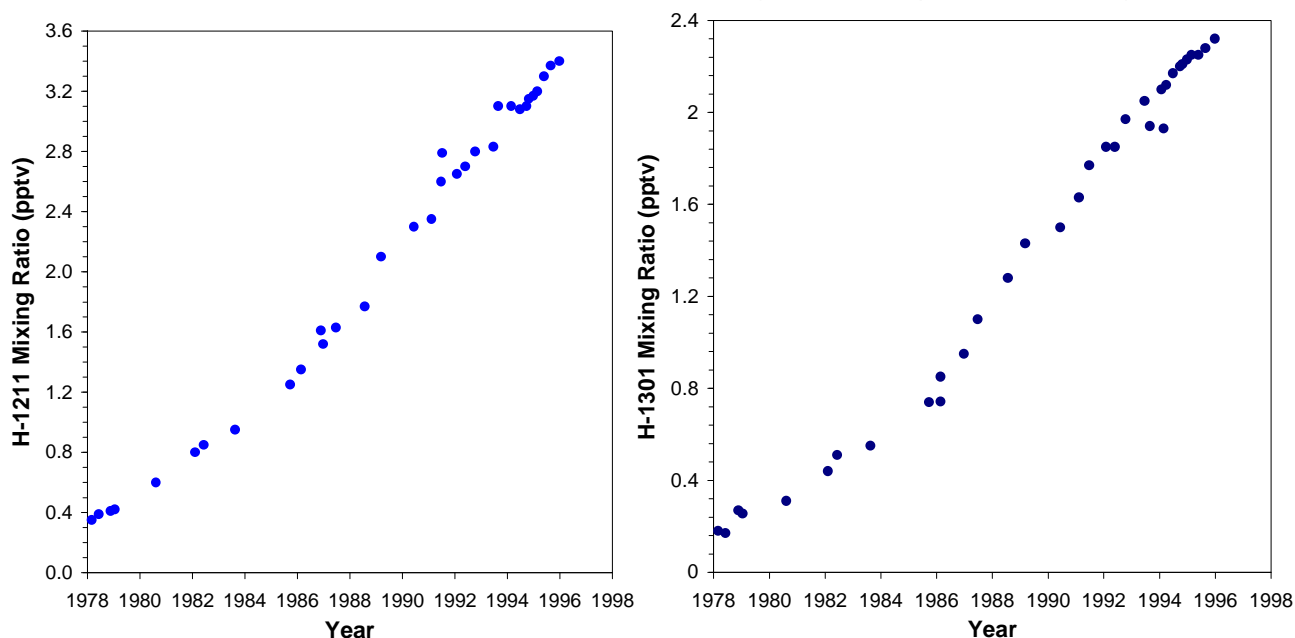


Figure 7 - Measured Atmospheric Concentration of Halons at Cape Grim, Tasmania.

Developing countries must start phasing out CFCs, Halons and carbon tetrachloride from July 1999.

Countries in Asia and Latin America in particular have been increasing their consumption due to their high rates of economic growth and must now arrest this growth and begin reversing it. While consumption levels in the developed countries have been much higher on both a per capita and a national basis, the Montreal

Protocol can only succeed if the 80% of world living in developing countries successfully phases out despite their economic growth. The Multilateral Fund will play an essential role in ensuring that this happens.

A large number of used CFC-based refrigerators are being exported to developing countries by countries that have phased out CFCs. These sales could make the future CFC phase out by developing countries more difficult by stimulating a large demand for CFCs to maintain this equipment.

CFCs are being replaced by HFCs, which have a large global warming potential. The Kyoto Protocol on climate change has included HFCs in the basket of six gases whose emissions are to be reduced by the industrialised countries. Are the two global protocols sending confusing signals? Does the Kyoto Protocol hinder the implementation of the Montreal Protocol? The Parties to the Montreal Protocol as well as the Parties to the Climate Change Convention have asked their scientific and technical panels to study the issues jointly. The Parties will consider this matter in 1999.

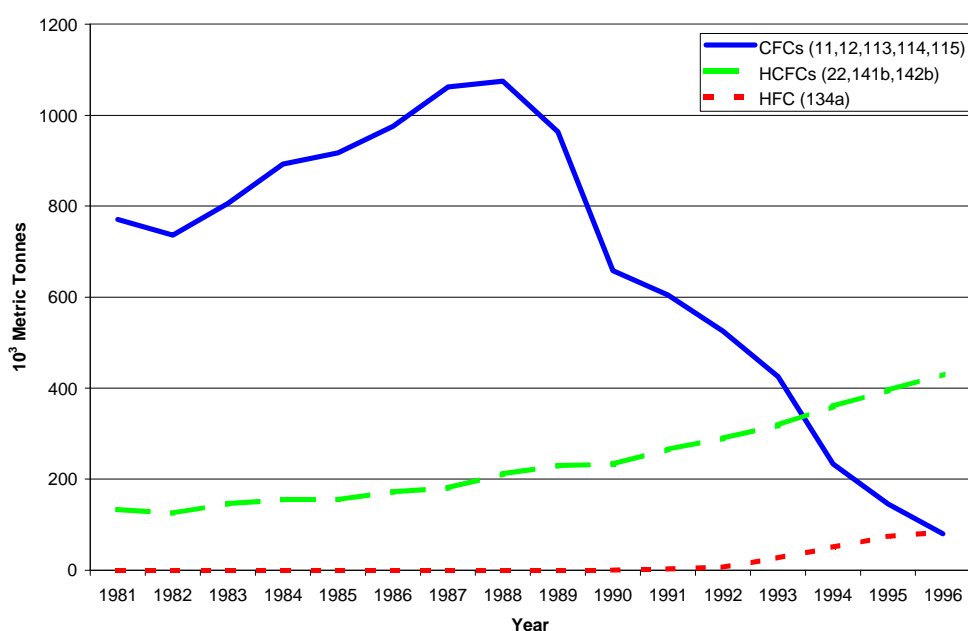


Figure 8 - Worldwide Production of CFCs, HCFCs and HFCs

9. Lessons of the Montreal Protocol

The Montreal Protocol offers many lessons that could be applied to solving other global environmental issues:

- Adhere to the "precautionary principle" because waiting for complete scientific proof can delay action to the point where the damage has become irreversible.
- Send consistent and credible signals to industry (e.g. by adopting legally binding phase-out schedules) so that they have an incentive to develop new and cost-effective technologies.
- Ensure that improved scientific understanding can be incorporated quickly into decisions about strengthening (or weakening) the provisions of a treaty.
- Promote universal participation by recognizing the "common and differentiated responsibility" of developing and developed countries and ensuring the necessary financial and technological support to developing countries.
- Control measures should be based on an integrated assessment of science, economics, and technology.

10. Note to Journalists

This backgrounder was updated in May 1999. Official documents and other information is available via the Internet at <http://www.unep.org/ozone> or at <http://www.unep.ch/ozone>. The Ozone Secretariat is based in Nairobi. For interviews or additional information, contact:

- Robert Bisset in Nairobi at tel. (+254-2) 623084, fax. (+254-2) 623692, e-mail: robert.bisset@unep.org;
 - Michael Williams in Geneva at tel. (+41-22) 917 8242, fax (+41-22) 797 3464, e-mail: mwilliams@unep.ch; or
 - Jim Sniffen in New York at (+1-212) 963 8098, fax (+1-212) 963 8193, e-mail: sniffenj@un.org.
-