



Press Releases/Information Notes



Philippines Customs Beef Up To Fight Illegal Trade in Ozone Depleting Substances

Pioneering licensing system must be made to work - UNEP/ DENR

Bangkok, February 13, 2003 - Inspections for illegal ozone depleting substances (ODS) will be beefed up at major Philippines ports and government offices following a workshop last week organised by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

Two hundred and fifty officers will be trained by the end of the year to intercept an estimated 400 tonnes of chloro-flouro carbons (CFCs) being smuggled into the Philippines for use as refrigerants.

DENR estimates about 15 to 20 percent of CFCs shipped to the country last year arrived without permits; through mislabeling or fraudulent papers.

UNEP Programme Officer Cecilia Mercado said "the training focused on very practical and effective ways to recognise shipping containers that have been tampered with or do not contain what they say they do."

She said the Philippines had been a pioneer country in implementing an import/export licensing system, and the workshop aimed to ensure it would now be effectively enforced.

Twenty port customs officers and 15 government officials attended the "train-the-trainers" workshop, which was held at the Clark Special Economic Zone, and will now repeat the training session with their workmates.

Philippine Environment Secretary Elisea G Gozun described customs officers as "the frontline in this chemical war."

" The continued use and manufacture of ODS is a global concern, affecting the entire planet and its inhabitants. We need to join hands with all government agencies and foreign partners to battle this menace," she said.

Under the Montreal Protocol for Substances that deplete the Ozone Layer and its amendments developing countries are required to phase out the use of CFCs by 2010 and to put in place licensing systems to monitor and control the use of ODS.

Signatory countries to the protocol have also recognised the importance of clamping down on illegal trade in CFCs and other substances. Millions of CFC-dependent refrigerators, automobile air conditioners and other equipment are still in service around the world, providing criminals with an incentive to smuggle CFCs and other banned substances across borders. Governments are seeking to minimize illegal trade through better monitoring, arrests and severe penalties. Efforts are also underway to restrict the export and import of used products and equipment that are dependent on CFCs and other ozone-depleting substances to cut demand.

Chemicals such as CFCs, halons, and methyl bromide destroy stratospheric ozone, which is essential for shielding humans, plants, and animals from the damaging effects of harmful ultraviolet light. Recent years have seen record thinning of the ozone layer, including an ever-larger ozone "hole" over Antarctica. Scientists predict that the ozone layer will start to recover in the near future and will fully recover some time in the mid-21st century - but only if the Protocol continues to be vigorously enforced.

In the Philippines illegal trade in ODS is being tackled under the Chemical Control Order under

Republic Act 6969, otherwise known as the Toxic Substances, Hazardous and Nuclear Wastes Control Act.

During last week's course UNEP discussed with DENR further training on other multilateral environmental agreements, such as the Convention for International Trade in Endangered Species and the Basel Convention on hazardous waste, where illegal trade is a problem.

Similar workshops are being planned in other Asian countries where ODS smuggling is occurring.

For further information:

More information on the work of UNEP's OzonAction programme can be found at <http://www.uneptie.org/ozonaction>

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