

Governments Urged to Back Global Inventory of Key Ozone Damaging Pesticide

News Comes as Countries Air Cartoon 'Ozzy Ozone' to Raise Awareness of Threats to the Earth's Protective Shield

International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer

Nairobi/Bridgetown, 16 September 2004 - Countries are today being urged to re-double efforts to assess the quantities of an ozone damaging chemical being used to kill pests on shipments of rice, maize, nuts and other big commodity export crops.

Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), said "significant knowledge gaps" existed on the true levels of methyl bromide being used around the world.

He said this could have implications for the global effort to repair the 20 mile high ozone layer which filters out harmful levels of the sun's ultraviolet rays.

Methyl bromide, a pesticide and one of the major ozone depleting substances in use, is being phased out for some key agricultural purposes under an international agreement called the Montreal Protocol. The phase-out covers such uses as fumigation of soils and pest control on farms.

However other pest-control purposes, involving exports of commodity crops, animal fodder, cut flowers, hides and consignments in wooden pallets, are exempted from the international phase out.

Some experts estimate that close to a fifth of methyl bromide use world-wide could be excluded from control measures under these Quarantine and Pre-shipment exemptions with the amounts growing in some regions.

Klaus Toepfer, whose comments are being made to mark the International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer, said: " Efforts to repair the ozone layer have been one of the great environmental success stories. Scientists estimate that, by the middle of the century and as a result of the phasing out on numerous ozone damaging chemicals, the ozone layer will be repaired. But this is far from guaranteed".

Under the Montreal Protocol, developed countries are required to end their use of methyl bromide on farms by the end of this year.

However some developed world farmers in Australia, Europe and North America, have expressed concern that the alternatives to methyl bromide may, in some cases, be less effective and more expensive.

Their governments are seeking so-called Critical Use Exemptions beyond the 2005 deadline which will be discussed again when countries gather in Prague, Czech Republic, in November.

"The quantities used on farms is very well understood and following an extraordinary meeting of the parties to Montreal Protocol in March this year, I hope we are now on a trajectory where its controlled uses are set to diminish. However the precise levels of methyl bromide being used for quarantine and pre-shipment purposes, where the chemical is used to kill insects like long horned and bark beetles, wood boring wasps, moths and other pests, remains uncertain," said Mr Toepfer.

He urged countries to back a global survey, being carried out for UNEP's Ozone Secretariat, so that governments can be better informed on the precise quantities of the chemical being used globally.

This year's observance of the International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer, a commemorative day designated by the General Assembly, has the theme "Save our Sky: Ozone Friendly Planet, Our Target".

Countries worldwide will be undertaking public awareness activities to celebrate achievements in complying with this treaty and to highlight remaining challenges before the job is done.

UNEP is helping countries by providing guidance and materials to support the 16 September celebrations. Principal among these is a new animated awareness video, *Ozzy Ozone*, in which the main character, an ozone molecule, takes viewers on a voyage of discovery to find out exactly what is attacking the Earth's protective ozone layer. It explains how children can protect themselves from the harmful effects of ultraviolet radiation caused by ozone depletion.

More than 56 governments will broadcast this video on their national television channels today, reaching millions of viewers worldwide. The film is available from UNEP in English, French and Spanish and has been subsequently translated into 15 national languages by the governments themselves.

This video uses key messages and concepts identified in the Communication Strategy for Global Compliance with the Montreal Protocol, a UNEP-developed information strategy linking awareness to national compliance obligations under this international treaty.

The global launch of the video is taking place in Barbados as the *Ozzy Ozone* character was originally created by the Government of Barbados for use in its national awareness programme, and then shared with the world through UNEP.

Today, UNEP is also announcing that the United Nations headquarters in Gigiri, Nairobi, is ozone-friendly with equipment such as fridges on the premises free of any ozone-depleting substances. It is hoped that the initiative can be extended to all UN complexes across the globe using guidelines developed earlier by UNEP's OzonAction Programme.

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OzonAction Web site, including *Ozzy Ozone* in streaming video, is available at www.uneptie.org/ozonaction

UNEP's Ozone Secretariat can be accessed at <http://www.unep.org/ozone/>

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