

Crack-down on Chemicals Criminals in Asia Pacific Registers First Successes

Geography & Geology

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Posted on : 2007/2/12 1:30:00

Customs Officers Intercept Illegal Ozone Damaging Substances Under UNEP-Backed Project Skyhole Patching

A new initiative to monitor and curb illegal trade in chemicals that damage the ozone layer-- the Earth's protective shield-- has begun registering some of its first promising results.

Today it was announced that seizures of up to 64.8 tons of illegal ozone depleting substance (ODS) have been reported in China, India, Thailand and other countries following the start of Project Skyhole Patching.

China Customs seized nearly 8.2 tons of Dichlorodifluoromethane (CFC-12), used in refrigerant and air conditioning systems, in the Guangdong Province between September and November 2006 – 752 kg in Shengzhen and 7.5 tons in Huanpu Port.

In West Bengal, India, customs and enforcement officials seized nearly 6 tons of illegal chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) between October and November 2006. Nearly 49 tones of illegal ODS were seized from other countries participating. More is expected to come.

"Months after he attended a workshop in Wuxi, China, a Chinese customs officer in Huanpu Port intercepted the illegal ODS using methods he learned there. It is encouraging to see that our training efforts, involving customs and enforcement officers in the 18 participating countries is beginning to have payoffs," said Ms. Ludgarde Coppens, Policy and Enforcement Officer, UNEP.

Project Skyhole Patching, to combat illegal trade in ODS and hazardous waste in the Asia Pacific region began 1 September 2006. It involves 20 customs and environmental authorities from 18 countries, including Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Japan, Republic of Korea, the Maldives, Mongolia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Viet Nam.

Since the project began, customs in Hong Kong, India and Thailand have played an active role in sharing information on ODS. Some countries like Viet Nam and Cambodia are holding bilateral discussions on illegal ODS trade.

"This timely information exchange among customs and environmental agencies in these countries has helped to monitor the movement of ODS in the region as well as other regions," said Mr. Liu Xiaohui, Head of Regional Intelligence Liaison Office for Asia and the Pacific.

Project Sky Hole Patching is now entering its second phase, which will focus on hazardous waste and begin 1 March 2007. Phase 1 of the project focused on ODS.

CFCs are among ozone depleting substances targeted for phase out under the Montreal Protocol.

Now entering its 20th year, the Montreal Protocol, one of the most successful environmental agreements to date, has succeeded in phasing out ODS in developed countries, led to the closure of many ODS producing plants and deterred the creation of industries that use them.

However, phase out of ODS becomes more crucial as the date for complete phaseout fast approaches for developing countries - 38 in Asia Pacific - who have committed to complete phaseout by 2010. Illegal trade in CFCs and other ODS is expected to grow as a complete ban is enforced.

Studies indicate that trade in illegal ODS represents nearly 10-20% of all trade in ODS. CFCs alone

account for 7,000-14000 tons of this trade, valued at US\$25-60 million.

The 20th Anniversary of the Montreal Protocol will be marked by a series of events and campaigns.

This will include an Asia Pacific Regional Media Workshop to be held in Singapore in April this year, which will look at ozone layer protection and linkages to climate change.

UNEP Division of Technology, Industry and Economics' OzonAction Programme:

<http://www.unep.fr/ozonaction/>

Green Customs Initiative: <http://www.greencustoms.org>