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UNEP

Asia Pacific law enforcements honoured for helping protect ozone layer

Bangkok, 20 May2015 – It was a proud day for law enforcers in Asia Pacific region receiving the first ever **Asia Environmental Enforcement Award (AEEA)** for their key roles in helping protect the atmospheric ozone layer that shields us from ultraviolet radiation harmful to human health and planetary life support systems.

The award was conferred by **UNEP Executive Director and United Nations Under-Secretary-General, Achim Steiner,** on national law enforcement bodies from **India, the Philippines and the Kingdom of Tonga** as well as a regional organization combating environmental crime, at a ceremony in Bangkok during the First Forum of Ministers & Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific, held from 19-20 May 2015.

"*Environment crime undermines sustainable development. It is not only a threat to species, to habitats and to ecosystems, but also to human health, livelihoods and national economies*" the UNEP Executive Director said at the award ceremony.

The winners were:

1. India's apex customs body, the Department of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) for seizing 45,790 cylinders of ozone-depleting CHCLF2 weighing 622,744 kg since 2012.
2. The Environmental Protection Unit (EPU), Enforcement and Security Services, Bureau of Customs, Philippines for seizing 90 containers of chemicals, including ozone-depleting substances (ODS) in 2014.
3. The Ministry of Revenue and Customs, Kingdom of Tonga for the seizure in September 2013 of 30 cylinders of the refrigerant HCFC R-22, a type of ODS. The Tonga Customs office works closely with the National Ozone Office in the country to monitor and report all refrigerants entering the country.

4. The Seoul-based Regional Intelligence Liaison Office for Asia-Pacific (RILO-AP) of the World Customs Organization for its role in promoting cooperation among Asian countries, leading to seizure of 70 ODS shipments of nearly 1,000 tons. RILO-AP coordinates Operation Sky-Hole Patching, launched in 2006 which brings together customs administrations and international organizations in the region to keep tabs on suspicious ODS shipments.

Illegal trade in ODS a threat to health, food security and local economies

Through their national and regional effective enforcement actions against the lucrative illegal trade in ODS, the awardees have not only helped countries in the region in complying with the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, but also in protecting public health, installed infrastructure and local economies.

The illegal trade in ODS, which includes a range of chemicals commonly used in refrigeration, industry, aerosols and agriculture, is growing in developing countries over the past decade. A study of the transboundary movement of ODS in the region found large discrepancies in ODS trade data between exporting and importing countries.

While developed countries have largely phased out ODS-based equipment and processes, demand for the chemicals remains high in developing countries for use in refrigeration and air-conditioning machines. The problem is worsened by the import of used refrigeration and air-conditional equipment. The illegal trade in ODS is facilitated by this high demand, low ODS prices in the international black market, low enforcement penalties for ODS smuggling are too small in many countries in the region.

Although a system of licensing the ODS trade, established under the Montreal Protocol, has been in operation since 2000, smugglers are evading this requirement by mislabeling imports as ozone friendly alternatives.

This illegal activity is undermining national efforts to comply with the universally ratified Montreal Protocol which regulates the gradual phase-out of ODS, mainly

chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) used for refrigeration and air-conditioning as well as halons used for fire-fighting and methyl bromide used as a crop fumigant.

The international commitment to phase out the use ODS has been hailed as a success and is estimated to have set the earth's ozone layer on the path to recovery, preventing millions of cases of skin cancers and cataracts. Successful implementation of the Montreal Protocol is also crucial for protecting the human immune system from damage linked to excessive exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation.

Another threat from high levels of UV radiation reaching the earth is damage to food crop production systems and fisheries, which can affect food security.

Every cylinder of ODS that slips through customs barriers into a developing country also has serious implications for local livelihoods. It means that local servicing technicians, who often work in the informal sector of the economy without proper training, might damage cooling machinery and thereby their future and continued employment prospects.

The award in the ozone-depleting substances (ODS) category has been jointly instituted by **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** and **Freeland** and funded by **the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)** together with the **United States Agency for International Development (USAID),** to encourage countries, organizations and individuals in the region to combat environmental crime.

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