

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FLUORINATED GASES VOTE A VICTORY FOR ENVIRONMENT

BRUSSELS Greenpeace welcomed a major result for climate protection today in the European Parliament environment committee vote on the Fluorinated Gases Regulation [1], which promises to restrict the use and release of harmful global warming gases.

“Until now, the chemicals industry has succeeded in blocking the replacement of these potent greenhouse gases. Today’s decision is a victory in the battle against global warming, and vindicates those progressive countries and companies that have already switched to climate-friendly alternatives,” said Mahi Sideridou of Greenpeace.

The committee improved the proposed Regulation in two major ways. Firstly, in contrast with the Commission and Council proposals, which focus on containing rather than replacing these powerful greenhouse gases, the Parliament committee has added a phase-out for the use of these substances in domestic and commercial refrigeration, air conditioning, foams (e.g. for insulation) and aerosols. Climate-friendly alternatives to fluorinated gases are widely available for all these applications. The committee also recommended a ban by 2008 on sulphur hexafluoride (SF₆), a fluorinated gas which is 23,900 times more potent than carbon dioxide and has a lifetime in the atmosphere of 3,200 years. It can be banned immediately in most applications.

Secondly, it allows member states to take measures that go beyond the suggested scope or timeline of the legislation in the interest of the environment and in order to meet Kyoto Protocol targets, by attributing to the Regulation a single legal basis on Environment. (This contrasts with the Council’s suggested split legal basis, which placed certain articles under the Internal Market article of the EC Treaty.) The decision supports Austria and Denmark, which have ambitious national legislation on fluorinated gases, and Sweden, which has similar intentions.

On car air-conditioning, the committee failed to improve the weak provisions, which allow for the use of these gases until 2017. For every year that the phase-out of fluorinated gases in cars is delayed, around 40 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent are emitted (equal to Portugal’s 1990 carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel use).

Greenpeace also welcomed the committee’s addition of a labelling requirement to support consumers’ right to know which products contain these gases and the extent of their impact on the climate.

“This outcome shows that environmental and business interests can go hand in hand to the benefit of all. It is an example that should be heeded by the full Parliament and by the Council of Environment Ministers,” said Sideridou.

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NOTES TO EDITOR [1] The Regulation (COM(2003)0492) deals with the use of potent greenhouse gases covered by the Kyoto protocol known as fluorinated or industrial gases: HFCs, PFCs and SF₆, used in everything from ‘air’ sports shoes to refrigeration and air-conditioning equipment. The gases are thousands of times more damaging than carbon dioxide.