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C greenhouse gas agreement  
adopted by nearly 200 nations


PATH TO PROGRESS

The historic Kigali agreement provides an international  
plan that phases out hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), gases used in air conditioners  
and refrigerators, which contribute to global warming.

by Yun Tan, Staff

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A historic agreement was reached Saturday morning when nearly 200 nations agreed to phase out a greenhouse gas over 10,000 times more powerful than carbon dioxide in causing global warming.

The deal, announced in Kigali, Rwanda, aims to cap and reduce the use of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) in a gradual process, grouping countries into categories with different deadlines depending on their capacity to transition to alternatives. The deal is seen as balancing the economic needs of people in developing nations against the worldwide threat of climate change.

Phasing out HFCs by more than 80 percent over the next 30 years will likely [avoid planetary warming of up to 0.5 degrees Celsius](#) by 2100, according to the White House.

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“Our goal is to limit warming to 2 degrees – avoiding half a degree is gigantic,” Andrew Light, senior fellow with World Resources Institute tells The Christian Science Monitor. “Countries that are most affected are saying, ‘Why won’t we do this?’ ”

Secretary of State John Kerry also praised this as another step forward in tackling climate change.


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1 of 5

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“The Kigali Amendment is just the [latest example of the tangible progress](#) the world is making to address climate change,” Mr. Kerry said in a press release. “Just last week, the Paris Agreement reached the thresholds to enter into force – the fastest entry into force of a global environmental agreement ever.”

The Kigali deal was seen as monumental by many observers who see banning HFCs – a chemical used in air conditioners and refrigerators – as key to slowing global warming. HFCs are a relatively easy target because many developed countries are already phasing out the gases, viable alternatives exist, and since the gas only lingers in the atmosphere for a relatively short time, a phase-out would see immediate benefits.

It is also a legally binding agreement where participating countries have to follow specific targets and timetables, unlike the Paris climate deal that had to be ratified by a certain number of nations before it went into effect this week.

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But Mr. Light, who was a climate change negotiator at the State Department and has been working on this issue for seven years, says getting this agreement wasn’t easy.

“That the president of the United States kept pushing this with his peers around the world was really critical to getting this done,” he says, citing Obama’s agreement with Chinese General Secretary Xi Jinping earlier this year. “A lot of countries are getting together frankly just from the threat of climate change.”

Also noteworthy was the space given for input from various participating nations who argued for individual timelines. India, in particular, called for a later deadline, saying they need more time to prepare. Island nations and many African countries, however, wanted an earlier deadline because climate change is seen as posing a bigger threat to them.

The final consensus, achieved Saturday, requires developed countries to begin taking action by 2019, while more than 100 developing countries will start by 2024. China, the world’s biggest HFCs polluter, will be part of the 2024 group, while the second-worst offender, the United States, must begin taking action by 2019.

A smaller group of nations, including India, Pakistan, and some Gulf states, will have until 2028. That deadline is three years earlier than India had proposed but later than the deadline some African nations suggested.

“Thank God we got to this agreement that is good for all nations, that takes into consideration all regional and national issues,” Taha Mohamed Zatari, the head of Saudi Arabia’s negotiating team, told the Associated Press.

“It may not be entirely what the islands wanted, but it is a good deal,” said Mattlan Zackhras, the minister-in-assistance to the president of the Marshall Islands. “We all know we must go further, and we will go further.”



5 environmental wins to celebrate



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**Amanda Paulson**  
Amanda Paulson, writer (Boulder, Colo.), has been a staff writer for the Moni...

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The world leaders will convene for another meeting in 2017 to sort out each nation's financial commitments. A group of donor countries and philanthropists announced in September an [intent to donate \\$80 million](#) to support countries who need assistance in phasing out HFCs and improving energy efficiency.

Countries who fail to meet their deadlines may face trade penalties and lose access to funding.

HFCs, commonly found in refrigerators and air-conditioners, were used as [replacements for chlorofluorocarbons](#) (CFC) after the latter, known to be ozone-depleting substances, were phased out with the 1987 Montreal Protocol.

But while HFCs do not harm the ozone layer, they are a potent greenhouse gas that could erase the climate benefit achieved by phasing out ozone-depleting substances if left unchecked. The [concern over HFCs' contributions](#) to global warming have risen with the ever-higher summer temperatures and the rising middle class – a growing economic power in developing countries that's purchasing air conditioners and refrigerators.

Alternatives to HFCs include [ammonia, carbon dioxide and hydrocarbons](#). As an European Union analysis points out, the more [climate-friendly replacements can improve energy efficiency](#) and are safe for use, although access to substitute hydrofluoroleins (HFOs) may [require financial support](#) for some countries.

The deal was legally binding because it could pass as an amendment to the Montreal Protocol that laid the pathway for regulating replacements for ozone-depleting substances, Light says.

But some critics challenge the the effectiveness of a staggered deadline. David Doniger, director of the National Resource Defense Council's climate and clean air program, argued in a blog post that countries that opt for a later start date will likely not be eligible for financial assistance from the Multilateral Fund, private foundations, or the World Bank energy efficiency lending.

"Companies in late-moving countries [will fall behind their peers](#) in other developing countries in adopting alternative refrigerants and state-of-the-art air conditioning technologies," Mr. Doniger wrote. "They will find themselves in a technological backwater."

On the other hand, as reported by The New York Times, some are worried that phasing out HFCs so quickly will [put cheap air-conditioners out of reach](#) from millions of Indians who may mark their "transition from poverty with the purchase of their first air-conditioner."

In a September roundtable discussion in New Delhi, India, industry association representatives voiced their concerns about how many [refrigerant manufacturers still do not have the capability](#) to "manufacture large quantities of low GWP (Global Warming Potential) refrigerants," arguing that this deal would therefore "surrender this market to Chinese companies."

They said that many small and medium enterprises may struggle to sustain their businesses even after receiving funding from the Multilateral Fund – and one noted that the funds have not always been effectively distributed in the past.

But Doniger tells the Monitor in an email that the fund has been helping developing countries transition for the past 25 years.

"With the transition away from HFCs, there's a huge opportunity to match that with improvements in the energy efficiency of air conditioners and other equipment whose sales are booming in the developing world," he writes.

"The payoff, in terms of reduced pressure on electric grids, fewer power plants to build, lower pollution, and stronger local industries, has been huge and will be again."

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