

# Greens and the United Nations ram through ban on methyl bromide

by Colin Lowry

The banning of the essential agricultural chemical methyl bromide by the Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer, will devastate world food production, and hasten depopulation. The ban for the year 2005 was rammed through at the 10th anniversary meeting of the international treaty, held in September in Montreal, after an extensive campaign by organizers for the United Nations Environment Program, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and various green lobbyists, to portray methyl bromide as an ozone depleter, and as replaceable. Both claims are lies, and continue the decade of propaganda and disinformation around the Montreal Protocol, and the suppression of the real science behind chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and ozone.

Methyl bromide is the most widely used agricultural fumigant, and is unique in that it acts as an insecticide, fungicide, herbicide, and nematicide. Its primary use is as a soil fumigant before planting, but it is also used to treat food-storage and transport facilities. The use of methyl bromide has raised yields for fruits, vegetables, and other crops by up to 500% since it was first introduced in the United States in the 1930s. International trade in many crops and wood products depends on the use of methyl bromide for eliminating pests from imports. There are no substitutes for most of the uses of methyl bromide, so eliminating its use would have disastrous impacts on several areas of the food production chain.

The ozone depletion scare which brought about the banning of chlorofluorocarbons, including freon, a safe and inexpensive refrigerant, claimed that chlorine in the atmosphere destroys ozone, thus allowing more ultraviolet radiation to reach the Earth. Bromine is also a halogen, like chlorine, so it didn't take long before compounds with bromine were also vilified as "ozone depleters" by the environmentalists. At the 1992 meeting of the parties to the Montreal Protocol, methyl bromide was added to the list of potential ozone-depleting chemicals. Citing this decision, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ordered the phaseout of methyl bromide use in the United States by 2001, under an amendment to the Clean Air Act in 1992.

A scientific study of bromine and stratospheric ozone shows that the banning of methyl bromide is based on a fraud. Nature produces about 99% of all of the bromide released into the atmosphere each year. Marine animals and plants use

methylation to eliminate wastes, and they produce about 300,000 tons of methyl bromide per year. Sea salt from the oceans contributes 2,000,000 tons of bromide per year, and volcanoes add an average of 78,000 tons more to the atmosphere each year. By contrast, the United States, which is the largest user of methyl bromide, produced only 32,000 tons of methyl bromide in 1990, which accounts for less than 1% of the total bromide produced by all sources for the year.

The elimination of mankind's use of methyl bromide, therefore, will do almost nothing to reduce the amount of bromine in the atmosphere. The claim of environmentalists and the Montreal Protocol is completely ridiculous, because if methyl bromide could deplete ozone, nature would have destroyed the ozone layer millions of years before man ever produced this chemical.

The data from the Crista-Spas experiments flown aboard the Space Shuttle in 1994, gave scientists the first three-dimensional picture of the various densities of ozone in the stratosphere, and demonstrated that all the computer-modelled depletion theories were false. The satellite measurements showed that the ozone layer is not at all a uniform "layer," but is more like a changing patchwork, very dynamic. The data also indicated that meteorological processes, not chemistry, determined regional ozone thinning and the appearance of "holes." This recent work supports what Gordon Dobson had found, studying the ozone layer in the Antarctic in 1957: that the seasonal thinning of the ozone there was due to natural processes.

## Science banned by Montreal Protocol

The UN Environment Program (UNEP) has created a large bureaucracy of committees under the Montreal Protocol, which are supposed to examine scientific and economic questions concerning methyl bromide. However, the real scientific questions about the validity of ozone depletion, the natural sources of methyl bromide, and the effect of the ban on agriculture, were not allowed to be discussed, and any conclusions the committees came to that did not fit the goal of the Montreal Protocol, were removed, and rewritten.

The Methyl Bromide Technical Options Advisory Committee (MBTOC) met in Bangkok in April, to discuss the technical feasibility of potential alternatives to methyl bro-

mide. The committee is composed mostly of scientists, and is divided up into groups charged with looking at methyl bromide alternatives in specific areas. Because methyl bromide is used mainly as a soil fumigant, the committee's report on alternatives in this area would play an important part in any recommendations made by the UNEP.

There are very few existing alternatives to the use of methyl bromide as a soil fumigant. Many of the potential replacements are toxic, and harm crop yields, and there is almost nothing new being developed. The committee was told by UNEP not to discuss the impact of the ban, or ozone depletion, or any other questions that might cast doubt on why anyone would even propose a methyl bromide ban.

Although most of the members of the soils committee did have technical expertise regarding methyl bromide use, there were several environmentalist members who had no technical knowledge whatsoever. Friends of the Earth and the Pesticide Action Network, linked to the terrorist Earth First! group, both had representatives on the soils committee. These representatives said openly that they opposed the use of *all* chemicals, and that none should be used as alternatives, and they acted to sabotage the scientific discussions. Imagine having representatives of groups who openly promote radical depopulation policies, and who point to science and mankind's growth as the enemy, serving on a supposedly "objective" scientific committee!

## Gestapo science

Despite the efforts of the green saboteurs, the soils committee agreed that there were almost no scientific data on reliable alternatives to support any reduction of the use of methyl bromide, and that sufficient alternatives were not likely to be developed in the near future. The final draft and executive summary of the committee report was to be approved by the committee before leaving Bangkok. However, the scientists of the committee never saw the final version of the report, which had been rewritten to support the quick phaseout of methyl bromide. The rewritten report claimed that the world could achieve a 75% cut in methyl bromide use by 2001, because there were abundant substitutes available. *This was the opposite of what the committee had concluded.* The soils committee never made any such recommendation, and it became clear that the chairman of the committee, Jonathan Banks, had directed the fraudulent rewriting, without consulting the scientists on the committee.

This pattern of fraud was not limited to the soils committee. The structural committee, which dealt with food-storage and processing applications, also had its report rewritten, without the committee's knowledge, after the Bangkok meeting. Once again, the recommendations of the report were changed to support the quick ban of methyl bromide, favored by the UNEP.

Outside of the technical committee meetings, the Eco-

nomics Panel met to discuss the economic viability of alternatives to methyl bromide, which would form an important part of the Technology and Economic Assessment Panel (TEAP) recommendations. The Economics Panel found that there was no alternative to methyl bromide that could demonstrate long-term cost effectiveness, and that the data on the economics of alternatives were pretty slim. The UNEP put tremendous pressure on the panel not to discuss the economic impact of the ban of methyl bromide on agriculture. The panel's report was then "edited" by the chairman, and carefully crafted sentences were added to change the tone of the report toward a rosy endorsement of the methyl bromide ban.

The TEAP recommendations, supposedly based on the MBTOC report, were "totally contrary to everything that has been agreed to by the experts in the options committee," said Colin Smith, as reported by the British magazine *New Scientist*, as he resigned from the committee in protest. The TEAP report, supporting a quick phaseout of methyl bromide, put the scientists on notice that the UNEP was making recommendations to the delegates to the Montreal Protocol meeting with no regard for truth. In protest, 21 members of the MBTOC committee signed a letter to the UNEP ozone secretariat, calling for an investigation into the fraudulent, unilateral rewriting of the committee's report by the chairman. The ozone secretariat took no action to investigate, and instead, several members of the MBTOC committee who opposed the environmentalist position were removed from the committee after the meeting in Bangkok.

Outside of the UNEP, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was pushing for a worldwide ban of methyl bromide by 2001, the same date dictated by the Clean Air Act amendments of 1992. For one year prior to the September 1997 Montreal Protocol meeting, the EPA and State Department have been in a fight with the U.S. Department of Agriculture over the methyl bromide ban. During this inter-agency dispute, the EPA has ignored the scientific objections to the quick phaseout of methyl bromide, brought up by scientists at the USDA. The questions about natural sources of methyl bromide, and the lack of data supporting methyl bromide as an ozone depleter, were quashed by the EPA and State Department.

Ironically, it is the USDA's Agricultural Research Service which is working on developing alternatives to methyl bromide use, but its research funding has not been increased. It usually takes about 10 years for a new pesticide or other agricultural chemical to go through the required testing, and certification by the USDA and the EPA, before it can be used by the public. At present, there are no good alternatives to methyl bromide, and even if there were one that had just been developed, it would take another seven years before it would be certified for use by the public. This fact, brought up by the USDA in negotiations, was completely ignored by the EPA, which still insists on the 2001 ban of methyl

bromide in the United States.

Commenting on the discussions between the USDA and the EPA, one source said, "No one will listen to the truth."

### **Destroying U.S. crops**

In 1993, the USDA's National Agricultural Pesticide Impact Assessment Program (NAPIAP) released a report which documented the devastating effects that the methyl bromide ban would have on U.S. agriculture. The report estimated an annual loss of \$1.3 to \$1.5 billion to American producers as a result of the ban. Because methyl bromide is unique, and no replacements or combinations of other chemicals would be as effective, its withdrawal from use would "result in progressively increasing economic losses for several years, and may culminate in the total destruction of the commodity and its allied industry," the report stated. Vegetable, fruit, and nut crops, primarily grown in Florida and California, would suffer severe losses in plantable acreage, with decreases in food production, and higher production costs.

According to the NAPIAP report, cucumbers and eggplants will disappear from production in Florida, because they are dependent on methyl bromide. Tomato production is likely to be down 50% in Florida and California, and strawberries by at least 50%. California grape production will be cut by 20%, with increasing losses as fewer grape vines are planted. The situation for almonds and walnuts in California is bleak, with losses of 20% in the short term, but increasing, because new trees cannot be planted without proper soil fumigation. Pepper production in Florida could fall 80% and in California by at least 10%, with crops such as carrots, melons, and cherries all suffering production losses as well. There are many more examples, all sharing the characteristic of reduced food production and higher prices, which will result from the methyl bromide ban.

Unlike the Montreal Protocol, which allows for pre-shipment and quarantine uses for imports and exports to eliminate introducing foreign pests, the U.S. Clean Air Act does not have any exemptions for methyl bromide use. Therefore, the 2001 ban of methyl bromide in the United States will cause a loss of significant export markets for American producers. Many countries require methyl bromide treatment before the entry of imports of vegetables, fruits, and wood products. Reliable alternatives are not available for quarantine treatment yet, except for irradiation, which is strongly opposed by environmentalists, who have blocked the building of sufficient irradiation facilities.

A potential fight against the early ban of methyl bromide in the United States by the Clean Air Act has been taken up by several Congressmen. Recognizing the economic losses that American agriculture will suffer, Representatives Gary Condit (D-Calif.) and Dan Miller (R-Fla.) have introduced a bill to amend the Clean Air Act, to delay the phaseout of methyl bromide until 2005.

### **Developing-sector opposition**

The UNEP had effectively eliminated any scientific truth from the official report on methyl bromide given to the delegates attending the Ninth Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol, held in September. The UNEP organizers of the Montreal Protocol had only one remaining obstacle to the methyl bromide ban: the opposition of the developing-sector nations. The delegates from the developing sector entered the meeting opposing any ban of methyl bromide use, pointing to the fact that their agricultural production would suffer, which would have a devastating impact on their already weakened economies. The U.S. delegation, led by the EPA, and the Canadian delegation, led the charge on behalf of the UNEP by pushing for a worldwide ban by 2001. The European Union countries were proposing that the developed nations phaseout methyl bromide by 2005, with the developing sector phaseout scheduled for 2015.

The negotiations between the developed and the developing-sector delegates were characterized by intense disagreements. However, Article 4 of the Montreal Protocol allows for total trade embargoes and economic warfare against any nation that does not abide by its rules, giving the developed nations the upper hand in any disputes with the developing sector. Also, the UNEP controls the Multilateral Fund, which is supposed to help nations offset the costs associated with the banning of CFCs and methyl bromide. Developing-sector nations that protest the methyl bromide ban too loudly may find themselves cut off by the Multilateral Fund. Beyond what the UNEP directly controls, the threats to whip dissenting nations into line could also include economic warfare by the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization, dominated by the financial elites that also control the UNEP.

At the Montreal Protocol meeting, almost every major environmentalist organization was present, pumping out propaganda to create an atmosphere of intimidation. The green groups were readily aided by the media, in portraying developing sector nations that opposed the methyl bromide ban as reckless regimes that were endangering the future of the planet.

The intimidation by the environmentalists and the arm-twisting and threats of economic warfare by the EPA and the UNEP proved to be too much for the developing-sector nations to resist. The outcome of the Montreal Protocol meeting was that the developed nations will ban methyl bromide by 2005, and the developing sector will phase out use by 2015, with a 20% cut in 2003. However, the use of methyl bromide for quarantine and pre-shipment treatment will remain exempt from the ban.

The ban of methyl bromide will decrease the world's food supply, at a time when famine haunts many areas of the world. The real cost of the ban will be seen in lives needlessly lost as a result of this scientific fraud.