

Q16: Has the Montreal Protocol been successful in reducing ozone-depleting gases in the atmosphere?

Yes, as a result of the Montreal Protocol, the total abundance of ozone-depleting gases in the atmosphere has begun to decrease in recent years. If the nations of the world continue to follow the provisions of the Montreal Protocol, the decrease will continue throughout the 21st century. Some individual gases, such as halons and hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs), are still increasing in the atmosphere but will begin to decrease in the next decades if compliance with the Protocol continues. Around midcentury, the effective abundance of ozone-depleting gases should fall to values that were present before the Antarctic “ozone hole” began to form in the early 1980s.

Effective stratospheric chlorine. The Montreal Protocol has been successful in slowing and reversing the increase of ozone-depleting gases (halogen source gases) in the atmosphere. An important measure of its success is the change in the value of *effective stratospheric chlorine*. Effective stratospheric chlorine values are a measure of the potential for ozone depletion in the stratosphere, obtained by summing over adjusted amounts of all chlorine and bromine gases. The adjustments account for the different rates of decomposition of the gases and the greater per-atom effectiveness of bromine in depleting ozone (see Q7). Although chlorine is much more abundant in the stratosphere than bromine (160 times) (see Figure Q7-1), bromine atoms are about 60 times more effective than chlorine atoms in chemically destroying ozone molecules. Increases in effective stratospheric chlorine in the past decades have caused ozone depletion. Accordingly, ozone is expected to recover in the future as effective stratospheric chlorine values decrease.

Effective stratospheric chlorine changes. In the latter half of the 20th century up until the 1990s, effective stratospheric chlorine values steadily increased (see Figure Q16-1). Values are derived from individual halogen source gas abundances obtained from measurements, historical estimates of abundance, and projections of future abundance. As a result of the Montreal Protocol regulations, the long-term increase in effective stratospheric chlorine slowed, reached a peak, and began to decrease in the 1990s. This initial decrease means that the potential for stratospheric ozone depletion has begun to lessen as a result of the Montreal Protocol. The decrease in effective chlorine is projected to continue throughout the 21st century if all nations continue to comply with the provisions of the Protocol. The decrease will continue because, as emissions become small, natural destruction processes gradually remove halogen-containing gases from the global atmosphere. Reduction of effective stratospheric chlorine amounts to 1980 values or lower will require many decades because the lifetimes of halogen

source gas molecules in the atmosphere range up to 100 years (see Figure Q16-1 and Table Q7-1).

Individual halogen source gas reductions. The reduction in the atmospheric abundance of a gas in response to regulation depends on a number of factors that include (1) how rapidly gas reserves are used and released to the atmosphere, (2) the lifetime for the removal of the gas from the atmosphere, and (3) the total amount of the gas that has already accumulated in the atmosphere.

The regulation of human-produced halogen source gases under the Montreal Protocol is considered separately for each class of one or more gases and is based on several factors. The factors include (1) the effectiveness of each class in depleting ozone in comparison with other halogen source gases, (2) the availability of suitable substitute gases for domestic and industrial use, and (3) the impact of regulation on developing nations.

Methyl chloroform and CFCs. The largest reduction in the abundance of a halogen source gas has occurred for methyl chloroform (CH_3CCl_3) (see Figure Q16-1). The implementation of the Montreal Protocol caused global production of methyl chloroform to be reduced to near zero. Atmospheric abundances subsequently dropped rapidly because methyl chloroform has a short atmospheric lifetime (about 5 years). Methyl chloroform is used mainly as a solvent and has no significant long-term storage following production. The reduction in effective chlorine in the 1990s came primarily from the reduction in methyl chloroform abundance in the atmosphere. Significant emissions reductions have also occurred for the chlorofluorocarbons CFC-11, CFC-12, and CFC-113 starting in the 1990s. As a result, the atmospheric amounts of these gases have all peaked, and CFC-11 and CFC-113 abundances have decreased slightly (see Figure Q16-1). As emissions of CFCs are reduced, their atmospheric abundances will decrease more slowly than methyl chloroform because of longer CFC atmospheric lifetimes (see Table Q7-1) and because CFCs escape very slowly to the atmosphere from their use in refrigeration

Past and Expected Future Abundances of Atmospheric Halogen Source Gases

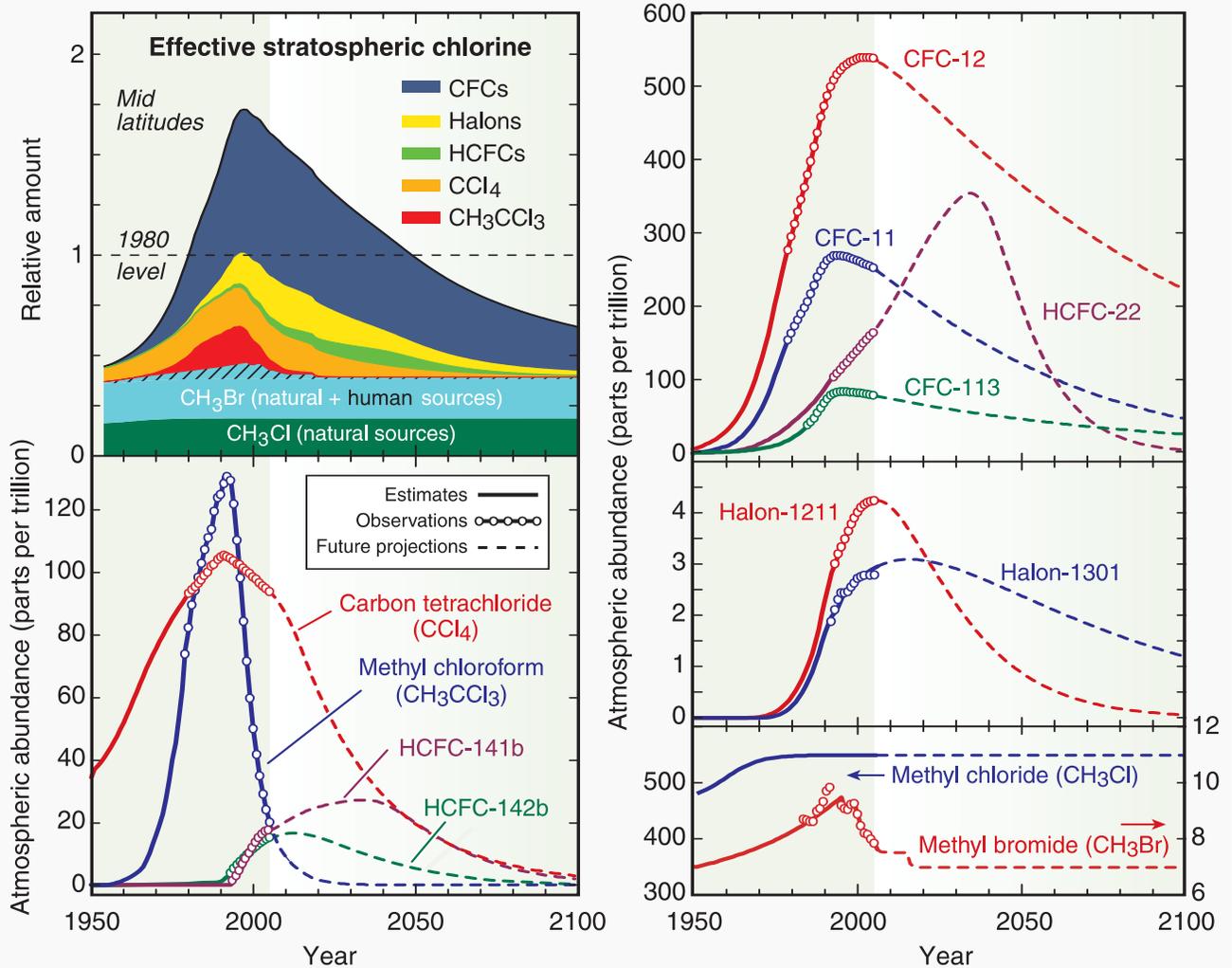


Figure Q16-1. Halogen source gas changes. The rise in effective stratospheric chlorine values in the 20th century has slowed and reversed in the last decade (top left panel). Effective stratospheric chlorine values are a measure of the potential for ozone depletion in the stratosphere, obtained by summing over adjusted amounts of all chlorine and bromine gases. Effective stratospheric chlorine levels as shown here for midlatitudes will return to 1980 values around 2050. The return to 1980 values will occur around 2065 in polar regions. In 1980, ozone was not significantly depleted by the chlorine and bromine then present in the stratosphere. A decrease in effective stratospheric chlorine abundance follows reductions in emissions of individual halogen source gases. Overall emissions and atmospheric concentrations have decreased and will continue to decrease given international compliance with the Montreal Protocol provisions (see Q15). The changes in the atmospheric abundance of individual gases at Earth’s surface shown in the panels were obtained using a combination of direct atmospheric measurements, estimates of historical abundance, and future projections of abundance. The past increases of CFCs, along with those of CCl₄ and CH₃CCl₃, have slowed significantly and most have reversed in the last decade. HCFCs, which are used as CFC substitutes, will continue to increase in the coming decades. Some halon abundances will also continue to grow in the future while current halon reserves are depleted. Smaller relative decreases are expected for CH₃Br in response to production and use restrictions because it has substantial natural sources. CH₃Cl has large natural sources and is not regulated under the Montreal Protocol. (See Figure Q7-1 for chemical names and formulas. The unit “parts per trillion” is defined in the caption of Figure Q7-1.)

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and foam products.

HCFC substitute gases. The Montreal Protocol allows for the use of hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) as short-term substitutes for CFCs. As a result, the abundances of HCFC-22, HCFC-141b, and HCFC-142b continue to grow in the atmosphere (see Figure Q16-1). HCFCs pose a lesser threat to the ozone layer than CFCs because they are partially destroyed in the troposphere by chemical processes, thus reducing the overall effectiveness of their emissions in destroying stratospheric ozone. Under the Montreal Protocol, HCFC consumption will reach zero in developed nations by 2030 and in developing nations by 2040 (see Q15). Thus, the future projections in Figure Q16-1 show HCFC abundances reaching a peak in the first decades of the 21st century and steadily decreasing thereafter.

Halons. The atmospheric abundances of halon-1211 and halon-1301 account for a significant fraction of bromine from all source gases (see Figure Q7-1) and continue to grow despite the elimination of production in developed nations in 1994 (see Figure Q16-1). The growth in abundance continues because substantial reserves are held in fire-extinguishing equipment and are gradually being released, and production and consumption are still allowed in developing nations. Atmospheric

halon abundances can be expected to remain high well into the 21st century because of their long lifetimes and continued release.

Methyl chloride and methyl bromide. Both methyl chloride (CH_3Cl) and methyl bromide (CH_3Br) are distinct among principal halogen source gases because a substantial fraction of their emissions is associated with natural processes (see Q7). The average atmospheric abundance of methyl chloride, which is not regulated under the Montreal Protocol, will remain fairly constant throughout this century if natural sources remain unchanged. At century's end, methyl chloride is expected to account for a large fraction of remaining effective stratospheric chlorine because the abundances of other gases, such as the CFCs, are expected to be greatly reduced (see Figure Q16-1). The abundance of methyl bromide, which is regulated under the Protocol, has already decreased in recent years and is projected to decrease further as a result of production phaseouts in developed and developing countries. For the later decades of the century, methyl bromide abundances are shown as nearly constant in Figure Q16-1. However, these abundances are uncertain because the amounts of exempted uses of methyl bromide under the Montreal Protocol are not known for future years.