

Press Release

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UN environmental organisation rewards a Swisscontact project

Zurich/Nairobi. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has recognized a project implemented by Swisscontact in India for its contribution to the protection of the ozone layer. Even today, this remains the key factor in the elimination of CFCs from air conditioners and refrigerators throughout the sub-continent.

Twenty years ago, the first 27 countries signed the Montreal Protocol for the Protection of the Ozone Layer. In 1992, India acceded to the Protocol. The country now had to find ways and means of reducing the emission of ozone-depleting substances. Amongst the worst polluters were air conditioners and refrigerators. At the time, many of these were cooling exclusively by means of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).

New coolants for new appliances

In the 1990s, within the framework of an earlier project, the industry was motivated to use alternative coolants and insulating materials, in order to reduce the CFC content. In 2003, the Indian Government prohibited the manufacture of cooling appliances that used CFCs.

To identify an ozone-friendly solution for the millions of CFC cooling appliances that were already in service (and would remain so for some time to come), Swisscontact, on behalf of SDC, implemented the HIDECOR (Human and Institutional Development in Ecological Refrigeration) Project. Between 2001 and 2004, working closely with private partners, more than 10,000 service technicians were given further training. Many of them were active in the informal sector, as independent small entrepreneurs. They learned to re-cycle the coolants . which had never been done before in India . and to replace them with an environmentally-friendly hydrocarbon-based alternative.

More than 10,000 service technicians receive further training

To ensure that the service providers knew not only how cooling appliances had to be converted, but were also able to buy the modern hydrocarbon-based coolants, the market had to be built up first. To convince manufacturers and importers that this business is profitable was one of our toughest challenges, recalls Manfred Egger, at the time the Swisscontact Project Leader. Since 2004, our Indian partners have been implementing the work of the Swisscontact Project throughout the rest of the country. The stated goal of the Indian Government is to ensure that by 2010, all cooling appliances in the country will be CFC-free.

31 Projects rewarded

To mark the 20th anniversary of the Montreal Protocol, the Ozone Secretariat, which is responsible for overseeing the conversion, rewarded a whole array of initiatives with a prize: the Montreal Protocol Exemplary Project Recognition. The Jury, comprising representatives of UNEP, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the World Bank, honoured a total of 31 projects.

Manfred Egger has moved on to become Swisscontact's Country Representative in Vietnam. He was very pleased to be reminded with an award of the successful project in India nearly three years on: This recognition shows that the project is still effective today.

Further information:

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Swisscontact is the development organisation of the Swiss private sector. Through advisory services, vocational training and further education, it promotes private enterprise and social development in selected countries in the south and east. Swisscontact fights poverty effectively, alongside selected partners, applying the principle of helping others to help themselves.