

PROTOCOL TO PROTECT OZONE

Nobody believed Chicken Little when he screamed the sky was falling. But as scientific data trickles in on the damage done to the ozone layer by man-made pollutants—namely chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs)—it appears the fabled worrywart may have hit on something.

For years, environmentalists have warned that CFCs (widely used in air conditioning, refrigeration, the manufacture of a wide variety of foam products and as solvents) are diluting the protective ozone layer that shields the Earth from ultra-violet radiation. A thinning of the ozone layer is thought likely to lead to more skin cancer, crop and other plant damage and serious climatic changes.

The warning hasn't fallen on deaf ears. In the mid-'70s, the United States and other countries banned aerosol sprays that were propelled by CFCs. Now, concern about the ozone has rallied international support for limits on CFCs. A

treaty signed in Montreal last September by the 24 countries that produce 75% of the world's CFC output (the Montreal Protocol), including the U.S., calls for restrictions on CFC production starting next year.

Specifically, the treaty will freeze the world's CFC production in 1990 at 1986 levels, then cut it in half by 1999. For the near future, the production cap means a tighter supply of chemicals and products containing CFCs—most notably refrigeration coolants, aerosols and plastic foam—and higher prices as chemical companies race to develop a suitable alternative.

A new breed of CFC with a less ravenous appetite for the ozone is on the way. Du Pont, the world's largest producer of CFCs and the leader in the substitute race, predicts it will take approximately 5-10 years to develop a suitable alternative.

Until replacements are available, however, the economic impact of the CFC cap will be felt by all users as demand outweighs supply. Though many manufacturers may absorb increased costs, consumers will pay slightly more for such things as vehicle air conditioners (which use 70% of the consumed freon) and home refrigerators. Ultimately, NAPA Jobbers can expect to pay higher prices for products containing CFCs.

NAPA Refrigerant believes that, despite a projected shortage in 1990, the company will be able to supply essentially all of existing customer requirements. In the meantime, we can feel good that actions stemming from the Montreal Protocol are helping to avert an estimated 132 million cases of skin cancer, 27 million deaths from skin cancer, and 1.5 million cases of eye cataracts that would otherwise occur among the next generation.

