

New UN partnership aims to reduce emissions of ozone-damaging gas used to treat pests



Tomatoes are among crops that may be treated with methyl bromide. Photo: World Bank/Simone D. McCourtie

14 November 2012 – The United Nations today signed a new partnership with the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) to improve management of methyl bromide (MeBr), a gas used to prevent the spread of pests and diseases which damages the ozone layer.

In a new memorandum of understanding, the IPPC, which is based at the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's ([FAO](#)) headquarters in Rome, and the UN Environmental Programme's ([UNEP](#)) Ozone Secretariat commit to work closely to promote existing

recommendations on the use of MeBr, as well as support efforts to develop alternative treatments to replace it where possible, FAO stated in a news release.

A colourless gas at room temperature, methyl bromide both occurs naturally and is manufactured. Marine organisms are estimated to produce 1-2 billion kilograms of it each year, while it is also released in small quantities by some terrestrial plants. For agricultural and industrial use, the gas is manufactured by reacting methanol with hydrogen bromide.

For decades, MeBr offered a potent tool in combating the spread of plant pests and diseases. However, in 1991 it was added to the list of substances controlled under the Montreal Protocol, an international agreement set up to phase out the use of ozone-depleting technologies.

The Protocol discourages the use of MeBr to combat pests and disease for non-quarantine purposes during production, but does make an exception for its utilization as a quarantine treatment, given its effectiveness in stopping pests and diseases.

The Protocol also calls for alternative practices, which requires plant protection authorities to have information on and access to other treatments that are affordable and effective according to their needs, FAO said in a [news release](#).

According to FAO, the new partnership aims to facilitate this transition to alternative treatments by improving regional and international coordination regarding MeBr management, fostering information exchanges and cooperative research on alternative treatments, and promoting best fumigation practices to minimize MeBr emission, among other measures.

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