

Environmental management of refrigeration equipment

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*Annex 9: Model guidance for the storage and transport of time and
temperature-sensitive pharmaceutical products*

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Contents

Acknowledgments	3
Contents	4
Abbreviations	5
Glossary	6
1. Introduction	8
1.1 Requirements.....	8
1.2 Objectives.....	8
1.3 Target readership.....	8
2. Guidance	9
2.1 Associated materials and equipment.....	9
2.2 Montreal Protocol.....	9
2.3 Selection of refrigerants and blowing agents	10
2.3.1 <i>Use of chlorofluorocarbons (CFC's)</i>	10
2.3.2 <i>Use of hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFC's)</i>	10
2.3.3 <i>Use of hydrofluorocarbons (HFC's)</i>	10
2.3.4 <i>Use of hydrofluoro-olefin (HFO's)</i>	10
2.3.5 <i>Use of hydrocarbons (HC's)</i>	11
2.3.6 <i>Ammonia and carbon dioxide</i>	11
2.3.7 <i>Other cooling technologies</i>	11
2.4 Counterfeit refrigerants.....	12
2.5 Thermal insulation.....	12
2.6 CO ₂ emissions.....	12
2.6.1 <i>Kyoto Protocol</i>	12
2.6.2 <i>CO₂ emissions from prime mover</i>	13
2.6.3 <i>ODP and high GWP refrigerants</i>	13
2.7 Installation and maintenance	14
2.8 Decommissioning.....	14
2.9 Staff training	15
References	16
Annex 1 – Montreal Protocol: non-Article 5 countries	17
Revision history	18

Abbreviations

A2L	An ASHRAE flammability class
ASHRAE	American Society of Heating, Refrigerating & Air-Conditioning Engineers
ATP	Agreement on the International Carriage of Perishable Foodstuffs and on the Special Equipment to be Used for such Carriage: - UNECE
BS EN	British Standard European Norm
CFC	Chlorofluorocarbons
EN 378	European Norm (standard) on the safety of refrigerants
F-Gas	Fluorinated Gas
GWP	Global Warming Potential
HC	Hydrocarbon
HCFC	Hydrochlorofluorocarbons
HFC	Hydrofluorocarbons
HFO	Hydrofluoro-olefin
MOP-19	Nineteenth Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol
ODP	Ozone Depletion Potential
ODS	Ozone Depleting Substance
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
TEWI	Total equivalent warming impact
TTSP	Time and Temperature-Sensitive Pharmaceutical Product
UNECE	The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE or ECE)
UNEP	The United Nations Environment Programme

Glossary

Article 5 country: The main objective of the Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol is to assist developing country parties to the Montreal Protocol whose annual per capita consumption and production of ozone depleting substances (ODS) is less than 0.3 kg to comply with the control measures of the Protocol. Currently, 147 of the 196 Parties to the Montreal Protocol meet these criteria (they are referred to as Article 5 countries).

Non-Article 5 country: Parties to the Montreal Protocol that have an ODS consumption of greater than 0.3kg per capita on the date of entry of the Montreal Protocol, or at any time thereafter within ten years of the date of entry into force of the Protocol.

Pharmaceutical product: Any product intended for human use or veterinary product intended for administration to food producing animals, presented in its finished dosage form, that is subject to control by pharmaceutical legislation in either the exporting or the importing state and includes products for which a prescription is required, products which may be sold to patients without a prescription, biologicals and vaccines. Medical devices are not included¹.

Refrigeration equipment: The term 'refrigeration' or 'refrigeration equipment' means any equipment whose purpose is to lower air and product temperatures and/or to control relative humidity.

Service Level Agreement (SLA): A service level agreement or contract is a negotiated agreement between the customer and service provider that defines the common understanding about materials or service quality specifications, responsibilities, guarantees and communication mechanisms. It can either be legally binding, or an information agreement. The SLA may also specify the target and minimum level performance, operation or other service attributes².

Standard Operating Procedure (SOP): A set of instructions having the force of a directive, covering those features of operations that lend themselves to a definite or standardized procedure without loss of effectiveness. Standard operating policies and procedures can be effective catalysts to drive performance improvement and improve organizational results.

Third Party Accreditation: Accreditation or certification by an organization that issues credentials or certifies third parties against official standards as a means of establishing that a contractor is competent to undertake a specific type of work. Third party accreditation organizations are themselves formally accredited by accreditation bodies; hence they are sometimes known as "accredited certification bodies". The accreditation process ensures that their certification practices are acceptable, typically meaning that they are competent to test and certify third parties, behave ethically and employ suitable quality assurance.

¹ Definition from WHO/QAS/08.252 Rev 1 Sept 2009. *Proposal for revision of WHO good distribution practices for pharmaceutical products – Draft for comments.*

² Definition from IATA. *2013/2014 Perishable Cargo Regulations (ePCR) & Temperature Control Regulations (eTCR)*

Time and temperature sensitive pharmaceutical product (TTSP): Any pharmaceutical good or product which, when not stored or transported within pre-defined environmental conditions and/or within pre-defined time limits, is degraded to the extent that it no longer performs as originally intended.

1. Introduction

This technical supplement has been written to amplify the recommendations given in section 10.2 of WHO Technical Report Series No. 961, 2011, Annex 9: *Model guidance for the storage and transport of time- and temperature-sensitive pharmaceutical products*³. It gives guidance on the selection of refrigerant gases and blowing agents so that countries can minimize the environmental impact of cold chain equipment used in fixed storage and transport operations. Related topics are covered in the Technical Supplement: *Maintenance of refrigeration equipment*.

1.1 Requirements

Ensure that all new refrigeration equipment for temperature-controlled storage and transport is specified to:

- Use refrigerants that comply with the Montreal Protocol;
- Minimise or eliminate the use of refrigerants with high global warming potential (GWP), and;
- Minimise CO₂ emissions during operation.

Select equipment to minimise whole-life environmental impact and employ best practice to eliminate leakage of refrigerant into the environment during installation, maintenance and decommissioning of refrigeration equipment.

Follow SOP's for purchase, maintenance and end of equipment life disposal, and ensure compliance with international protocols and accords on climate change and environmental protection. Train staff to avoid excessive release of refrigerants.

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of the Technical Supplement are to provide guidance on how to meet the above requirements with regard to the environmental impact of fixed and mobile refrigeration equipment, whilst ensuring the efficacy of TTSP storage and transportation.

1.3 Target readership

The target audience is principally the owners and operators of warehouses, pharmacies and other stores and owners and operators of refrigerated vehicles used to transport TTSP's. Some of the content may also be useful to equipment manufacturers and suppliers.

³ <http://apps.who.int/medicinedocs/documents/s18683en/s18683en.pdf>

2. Guidance

The component elements of refrigeration systems contain gases which can cause long-term environmental damage; some products may also be toxic or flammable. The principal focus of this Technical Supplement is to prevent these gases from leaking into the atmosphere where they accumulate, or into the immediate environment where they may affect occupants or become a fire hazard.

Refrigerant gases containing chlorine or bromine have a high Ozone Depletion Potential (ODP) and damage the planet's ozone layer. These and several other gases also have a high Global Warming Potential (GWP) and contribute disproportionately to the continuing increase in global warming.

The principal focus of the environmental impact is the refrigeration source and the prime mover. However, the thermal performance of cold room and refrigerator insulation and the insulation of the bodies of refrigerated vehicles also have an impact. Insulation limits heat transmission. This reduces the size and refrigerant charge needed for the cooling machinery, reduces energy consumption and hence limits CO₂ emissions from the refrigeration plant. However, the blowing agents used to manufacture many insulation products may have a high ODP and/or high GWP. Leakage of these agents into the atmosphere during the service life of the equipment and during end of life disposal can therefore have an adverse environmental impact.

2.1 Associated materials and equipment

Minimising the emission of gases with high Global Warming Potential (GWP) requires rigorous service procedures and appropriate service equipment. Service equipment includes refrigerant recovery machines, refrigerant recovery bottles and leak detectors.

2.2 Montreal Protocol

Use of refrigerant gases and blowing agents is governed by the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. This Protocol was subsequently adjusted and/or amended in London in 1990, Copenhagen in 1992, Vienna in 1995, Montreal in 1997 and Beijing in 1999.

Under the amendments and adjustments to the Protocol, non-Article 5 parties (see **Annex 1**) were required to phase out production and consumption of: halons by 1994; CFC's, carbon tetrachloride, hydrobromochlorofluorocarbons and methyl chloroform by 1996; bromochloromethane by 2002; and methyl bromide by 2005. Article 5 parties were required to phase out production and consumption of hydrobromochlorofluorocarbons by 1996, bromochloromethane by 2002, and CFC's, halons and carbontetrachloride by 2010. Article 5 parties must still phase out production and consumption of methyl chloroform and methyl bromide by 2015. Under the accelerated phase-out of HCFC's adopted at MOP 19, HCFC production and consumption by non-article 5 parties was frozen in 2004 and is to be phased out by 2020, while for Article 5 parties, HCFC production and consumption is to be frozen by 2013 and phased out by 2030 (with interim targets prior to those dates, starting in 2015). There are exemptions to these phase-outs to allow for certain uses lacking feasible alternatives.

2.3 Selection of refrigerants and blowing agents

A numbering system is used for refrigerants (e.g. R-134a), developed by ASHRAE. Prefixes can be: R, CFC, HCFC, HFC or HFO. The rightmost numeric value indicates the number of fluorine atoms in the molecule, the next value to the left is the number of hydrogen atoms plus 1, and the next value to the left is the number of carbon atoms less one (zeroes are not stated). Remaining atoms are chlorine.

2.3.1 Use of chlorofluorocarbons (CFC's)

A chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) is an organic compound that contains only carbon, chlorine, and fluorine, produced as a substituted derivative of methane and ethane. It is an ozone-depleting compound, which is highly damaging to the environment.

It is now illegal to operate refrigerated vehicles using CFC's as the refrigerating fluid or to have CFC's within the insulation in non-article 5 countries. WHO recommends that fixed refrigeration equipment and refrigerated vehicles containing CFC's should not be purchased or operated.

2.3.2 Use of hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFC's)

Chlorofluorocarbons (HCFC's) are similar to CFC's but contain hydrogen and have a lower ozone depleting potential.

It is now illegal to purchase new refrigerated vehicles using HCFC's as the refrigerating fluid or having HCFC's within the insulation in non-article 5 countries, though they can still be operated using recycled refrigerant. It is recommended that refrigerated vehicles containing HCFC's should not be purchased in article 5 countries though they can and should be operated to the end of their design life.

2.3.3 Use of hydrofluorocarbons (HFC's)

Hydrofluorocarbon refrigerants are composed of hydrogen, fluorine and carbon atoms connected by single bonds between the atoms; they do not deplete the ozone layer because they do not contain chlorine or bromine. However, they do have a high GWP; some higher than others (see later section). Atmospheric concentrations of these gases are rapidly increasing.

Currently most refrigerated transport solutions and most fixed refrigeration equipment depend on the use of HFC's and therefore there is no alternative, however HFC's with lower GWP should be considered. Hydrocarbons are recommended for smaller systems.

2.3.4 Use of hydrofluoro-olefin (HFO's)

HFO (hydrofluoro-olefin) refrigerants are the fourth generation of fluorine-based refrigerants. HFO refrigerants are composed of hydrogen, fluorine and carbon atoms, but contain at least one double bond between the carbon atoms.

These compounds have zero ODP and a very low GWP. Therefore these products offer a more environmentally friendly alternative, although there are issues with flammability.

At the time of writing, these products are in an early stage of development but are beginning to be introduced into the market. When available they would be an acceptable

alternative, providing machinery is correctly designed to take into account their flammability.

2.3.5 Use of hydrocarbons (HC's)

Several hydrocarbons have excellent refrigeration fluid properties, zero ODP, and very low GWP. The sole disadvantage of using HC's is their flammability and the risk of explosion. It is recommended that small refrigerators with refrigerant charges of less than 150g should be preferentially purchased where an option to do so exists. Larger charges can be used, provided safety conditions are met.

The limiting factor associated with the use of hydrocarbon refrigerants is the refrigerant charge size, the occupancy category and the room size. Systems with charge sizes of 0.15 kg or less may be installed in a room of any size. However, for systems with charge size of more than 0.15kg and up to 1.5kg, the room size should be such that a sudden loss of refrigerant does not raise the mean gas concentration in the room above the practical limit 0.008kg/m³. If it is proposed to use even large charges of HC, this is permitted though it is strongly recommended that Standard EN 378 be consulted for safety recommendations.

2.3.6 Ammonia and carbon dioxide

Ammonia has excellent refrigerant properties and has been used for many years in larger cold stores. It is still widely used in gas and kerosene-fuelled absorption refrigerators and freezers, which provide cold chain in places without a reliable electrical supply. Ammonia is inexpensive and leaks can easily be detected by smell, it has no ODP and low GWP. Its disadvantages are that it has moderate flammability and is toxic.

Carbon dioxide could well be the refrigerant of the future. It has mostly good thermodynamic properties and it is starting to be used in supermarket, cold store and bottle cooler applications. It has no ODP and a GWP, by definition, of 1. Its main disadvantages are high operating pressures and a critical point (inability to condense) of 29°C, which makes it operate less efficiently, transcritically, in hot environments.

2.3.7 Other cooling technologies

Other technologies for cooling exist that do not, in themselves, have ODP but are less common than vapour compression and absorption systems. However all passive systems such as liquid nitrogen, ice-packs and PCM-packs rely on a source of mechanical cooling using one of the gases described above. Examples include:

- *Liquid nitrogen*: used for cooling in some countries.
- *Liquid or dry carbon dioxide*: liquid carbon dioxide is used for cooling refrigerated vehicles in some countries. Solid carbon dioxide (dry ice) is used to keep small packs cool.
- *Water-packs*: Water-based coolant-packs may either be frozen (ice-packs) or cooled (cool water-packs). They are placed in insulated containers to help maintain the temperature of the stored product.
- *Phase-change materials (PCMs)*: these are coolant-packs containing waxes or other substances that are pre-cooled and placed in insulated containers like water-

packs. PCMs have the specific advantage that they can be designed to change phase at a desired temperature – e.g. +5°C.

- *Peltier effect*: Peltier cooling is an electronic system that can be used to maintain the temperature of small cool boxes.

2.4 Counterfeit refrigerants

A problem with counterfeit refrigerants has emerged in recent years in response to the restrictions put in place by the Montreal Protocol. These refrigerants are labelled as pure HFC's or HFC mixtures but in fact contain a cocktail of refrigerants including those with an ODP potential. Some counterfeit blends contain methyl chloride, which is toxic and can react with aluminium components, sometimes causing explosions. Counterfeit refrigerants usually contain chlorine; they are cheaper than might be expected and do not come through recognised supply channels. Refrigerants containing chlorine can be detected using a flame halide torch.

2.5 Thermal insulation

Foam insulation in cold store panels, refrigerator casings and refrigerated vehicle bodies has a considerable environmental impact. The insulation foam is expanded with a reagent that can have a GWP or ODP and the efficacy of the insulation affects the fuel consumption of the refrigeration equipment. Insulation also ages and can deteriorate by around 5% each year. As the foam deteriorates, the blowing agent leaches away; this adds to GWP and gives rise to additional fuel and electricity consumption.

2.6 CO₂ emissions

Carbon dioxide emissions from the prime mover driving the refrigeration equipment are affected by the efficacy of the insulation and contribute to GWP via the Total Equivalent Warming Impact (TEWI). The more work the refrigeration system does, the more energy is consumed and therefore the higher the CO₂ emissions. ATP regulations for frozen transport state that the insulation should have a value of <0.4W/m²K and for chilled transport a value of <0.7W/m²K. It is recommended that new vehicles be selected with an insulation coefficient <0.4W/m²K.

2.6.1 Kyoto Protocol

The Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is an international treaty that is supposed to set binding obligations on industrialised countries to reduce emissions of GWP (“greenhouse”) gases. Whilst all countries agree that GWP affects the climate, there is disagreement about accepting all of the reduction implications and therefore some countries have not signed or ratified the agreement. Nevertheless, responsible operators of fixed and mobile refrigeration equipment should take steps to minimise energy consumption and GWP gas emissions. This is also likely to be in their long-term economic interest, because of the savings in operational cost from using more efficient equipment.

2.6.2 CO₂ emissions from prime mover

The sizing of the refrigeration equipment relative to the heat load has a significant effect on carbon dioxide emissions. The ATP agreement stipulates an over-capacity of a least 1.75 times the overall heat ingress into the insulated body under operating conditions and +30°C ambient. If the predicted ambient temperature is above +30°C, it would be prudent to increase the over-capacity to 2.25.

2.6.3 ODP and high GWP refrigerants

When selecting fixed refrigeration systems and refrigerated vehicles, those involved in the procurement procedure should consider the ODP and GWP of the refrigerating fluid used in the cooling equipment and the blowing agent in the insulating foam. Table 1 gives the ODP and GWP of popular refrigerating fluids used in refrigeration systems. When specifying new equipment, the table can be used to help select reagents with zero ODP and the lowest technically possible GWP.

Table 1 – ODP and GWP of common refrigerants and blowing agents

Refrigerant	Name	Structure	GWP	ODP
CFC-11	trichlorofluoromethane	CCl ₃ F	4,750	1
CFC-12	dichlorodifluoromethane	CCl ₂ F ₂	10,900	1
CFC-502	chlorodifluoromethane chloropentafluoroethane	CHClF ₂ CClF ₂ CF ₃	4,657	0.25
HCFC-141b	1,1-dichloro-1-fluoroethane	CCl ₂ FCH ₂	725	0.12
HCFC-22	chlorodifluoromethane	CHClF ₂	1,810	0.05
HFC-134a	1,1,1,2-tetrafluoroethane	CH ₂ FCF ₃	1,430	0
HFC-404a	pentafluoroethane 1,1,1-trifluoroethane 1,1,1,2-tetrafluoroethane	CHF ₂ CF ₃ CH ₃ CF ₃ CH ₂ FCF ₃	3,922	0
HFC-407a	difluoromethane pentafluoroethane 1,1,1,2-tetrafluoroethane	CH ₂ F ₂ CHF ₂ CF ₃ CH ₂ FCF ₃	2,107	0
HFC-410a	difluoromethane pentafluoroethane	CH ₂ F ₂ CHF ₂ CF ₃	2,088	0
HFO-1234yf	2,3,3,3-tetrafluoropropene	CF ₃ CF=CH ₂	4	0
HFO-1234ze	trans-1,3,3,3-tetrafluoropropene	CF ₃ CH=CHF	6	0
N/A	cyclopentane	C ₅ H ₁₀	11	0
HC-290	propane	CH ₃ CH ₂ CH ₃	11	0

Refrigerant	Name	Structure	GWP	ODP
HC-600s	isobutane	CH(CH ₃) ₂ CH ₃	3	0
R-717	ammonia	NH ₃	0	0
R-744	carbon dioxide	CO ₂	1	0

CFC-11 and HCFC-141b were previously used as insulation foam blowing agents. Most commonly these gases have now been replaced with cyclopentane, although various HFC's are sometimes used. First generation CFC refrigerants, such as CFC-12 and CFC-502, are no longer used. HCFC-22, and blends containing this gas, have a lower ODP and are now used less frequently; they are illegal in non-article 5 countries. HFC-134a and HFC-404a are commonly used refrigerants. However, there is now pressure on HFC-404a because of its high GWP and alternatives are being sought. HFO's are the new generation of refrigerants currently under development, but these have flammability concerns in the form of 'slow flame propagation'; they are classed by ASHRAE as A2L, low toxicity, low flammability refrigerants with a maximum burning velocity of $\leq 10\text{cm/s}$. Ammonia has been used for many years in large stores; carbon dioxide is now used in larger equipment and in development models of refrigerators and transport units.

2.7 Installation and maintenance

Only technicians trained in handling refrigerant gases should carry out the installation and maintenance of refrigeration equipment.

Historically, vehicle-cooling systems have high levels of gradual leakage from mechanical seals, glands, valves and mechanical joints. Generally, fixed equipment has lower leakage rates.

Regular leakage checks can identify such leaks and minimise emissions. An inventory should be maintained and an associated SOP detailing the following:

- Quantity and type of refrigerant charge in each piece of equipment.
- Quantities of refrigerant added at service.
- Quantities of refrigerant recovered in service.
- Dates and results of leakage checks.
- Identity of personnel undertaking checks.

2.8 Decommissioning

At the end of its economic life, fixed refrigeration equipment and refrigerated vehicles need to be decommissioned. The life of a vehicle is likely to depend on the condition of the insulated body, though it is unlikely to be in excess of 15 years, and more likely 12.

The following is recommended:

- A trained technician should remove the refrigerant from the cooling equipment. It should be incinerated in an approved plant or recycled by a refrigerant manufacturer with appropriate facilities.

- The insulated enclosure, if it is to be used as a store, should be made safe to ensure it is impossible for people to get trapped inside.
- If the insulation of the enclosure contains ODP or GWP reagents, it should, if technically feasible, be crushed so that the foaming reagents can be recovered.
- Absorption refrigerators should be disposed of with care as they are pressurised and older units contain a corrosion inhibitor (sodium dichromate). Some countries restrict the disposal of this substance in landfill.

2.9 Staff training

All employees who are involved with the handling of refrigerants should be given training.

This should include:

- Handling of refrigerant fluids;
- Installation;
- Maintenance;
- Servicing.

Training should also include reference to the environmental impact of releasing high GWP refrigerants into the environment and their effect in accelerating climate change.

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⁴ Every four years a comprehensive report is produced by UNEP on substances that deplete the ozone layer and the Montreal Protocol.

Annex 1 – Montreal Protocol: non-Article 5 countries

1. Andorra
2. Australia
3. Austria
4. Azerbaijan
5. Belarus
6. Belgium
7. Bulgaria
8. Canada
9. Cyprus
10. Czech Republic
11. Denmark
12. Estonia
13. European Union
14. Finland
15. France
16. Germany
17. Greece
18. Holy See
19. Hungary
20. Iceland
21. Ireland
22. Israel
23. Italy
24. Japan
25. Kazakhstan
26. Latvia
27. Liechtenstein
28. Lithuania
29. Luxembourg
30. Malta
31. Monaco
32. Netherlands
33. New Zealand
34. Norway
35. Poland
36. Portugal
37. Russian Federation
38. Romania
39. San Marino
40. Slovakia
41. Slovenia
42. Spain
43. Sweden
44. Switzerland
45. Tajikistan
46. Ukraine
47. United Kingdom
48. United States of America
49. Uzbekistan

Revision history

Date	Change summary	Reason for change	Approved