EU government experts look at F-gas import ban

IN BRIEF
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As part of this proposed “phase-down,” appliances such as refrigerators and air-conditioning units would still be able to be imported to the EU. But they would have to be filled with the F-gas where they are installed.

The commission, and many members of the European Parliament, believe this would make sure that imported equipment meets the same safety standards as F-gas installations produced in Europe. About a fifth of fluorinated gases, which can have a warming effect up to 23,000 times higher than carbon dioxide, are expected to be needed for imported equipment by 2030.

But several industries relying on pre-charged equipment say the proposal will actually increase the amount of refrigerants needed.

The European Heat Pump Association says a ban on pre-charging would mean that each unit would likely need filling twice. “First in the factory — a step indispensable for performance and safety tests — and second at the place of installation,” the group says in a statement.

Heat pumps are used to transfer thermal energy, often from a renewable power source. The heat can be moved in either direction, meaning that heat pumps are used both for cooling devices such as air-conditioning units and for heating technologies such as water heaters.

The heating and cooling industry says this longer process also increases the risk of mistakes, and therefore of F-gas leaks.

The European Partnership for Energy and the Environment, an industry group representing manufacturers including Hitachi, Honeywell and Johnson Controls, says the pre-charge ban should be scrapped. Importers should instead be allowed to apply for an F-gas quota under the same rules as domestic EU producers, the group says.

“Pre-charged equipment” is expected to be the main item of debate at a meeting of national representatives on the EU environment working group today.

The problem wasn't resolved in government talks led by Ireland in the first half of this year, where national experts focused instead on agreeing quotas for the amount of F-gas allowed in Europe.

This leaves Lithuania, the current holder of the EU’s rotating presidency, to look for an answer to the pre-charge question.