Breaking News: European Parliament gives overwhelming vote to F-Gas refrigerant measures

12 March 2014 | By Andrew Gaved

The new F-Gas regulations, “one of the most ambitious pieces of legislation that the EU has developed in recent years”, have been adopted with an overwhelming majority by the Plenary session of the European Parliament.

The plenary session of the European Parliament has passed the F-Gas regulations as proposed by 644 votes to 19 + 16 abstentions. Thus a phasedown of HFCs and future bans on use of the refrigerants in certain sectors of new equipment will become a reality.

The final stage is a formal endorsement from the Council of the European Union.

The passage of the regulation through the European parliamentary process has been viewed as an endorsement of the ability of the often opposing interests of green MEPs and the cooling industry to reach a compromise, rowing back from the more extreme proposals laid down initially.

Immediately afterwards, European Climate Commissioner Connie Hedegaard tweeted: “I welcome the ‘beginning of the end’ for super-warming greenhouse gases.”

European cooling and industry body EPEE welcomed the prospect of a completely new regulatory framework to reduce emissions from HFCs in Europe. (...)

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The European Heat Pump Association (EHPA) also welcomed the news. Thomas Nowak, Secretary General, said: "The heat pump industry hopes for the same decisiveness from the Member States in the weeks to come. Only a quick finalisation will create the legal certainty required by industry to start working on delivering its contribution to the phase down. It will trigger the phasing in of alternative refrigerants for product groups where this is feasible already today and it will kick-off research and development for those product groups, where the alternatives are still unclear. It is also up for the European Commission to back the transition to alternatives by earmarking funds in Horizon 2020 to support it."

The Parliamentary decision was equally welcomed by green NGOs the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) and the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) as a significant step forwards for the climate.

"This is a hugely encouraging lead from Europe in the fight against climate change," said Clare Perry, Head of EIA's Global Environment Campaign. "With the EU showing a progressive lead in this field, this decision should act as a catalyst for future international negotiations in pursuit of a global deal to address HFCs which, if achieved, could avoid emissions of up to 100 billion tonnes of CO₂-equivalent by 2050."

It will cap the amount of HFCs which can be placed on the European market, gradually reducing over time the amount to 21 per cent by 2030. Their use currently accounts for about two per cent of European emissions and this is growing rapidly, the EIA said.

Alongside the cap and phase-down, the EU has now agreed to ban the use of HFCs in new equipment in a number of sectors, most notably in commercial refrigeration by 2022. In addition, from 2020 very high global warming potential HFCs with GWPs above 2500 will no longer be used to service and maintain refrigeration equipment.

Susanna Williams, Climate and Energy Policy Officer at the EEB, said: "Over 400 European companies, many of them small businesses, produce climate-friendly alternatives using natural refrigerants. Innovative businesses like these will only grow and generate jobs if Europe gives them the right market signal.

"Correct implementation of this regulation will be key if we are to avoid the same problems that plagued its previous incarnation."