

EDITORIALS

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Follow these pioneers

Bravo to Irvine, Calif., for acting on the environment where national governments have been loathe to tread.

Irvine is frustrated by the plodding pace of national measures to phase out use of chemicals that deplete the earth's ozone layer. So this small city is adopting what may be the world's toughest measures against the use of such chemicals. It is showing precisely the sort of resolve this newspaper has repeatedly called on Montreal city hall and the Quebec government to demonstrate.

Irvine is, for example, requiring repair shops and garages to capture and recycle chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) in refrigerators and in the air conditioners commonly used in automobiles, homes and businesses. It is banning halons, the most damaging to the ozone layer of all chemicals, in fire extinguishers. And it is phasing out the use of CFCs in such industrial processes as cleaning computer circuitry.

Though the city has a population of only 105,000, its bylaw is not empty symbolism. Irvine is a high-tech centre whose numerous computer and aerospace companies make widespread use of the chemicals. They will now have to find substitutes well in advance of the pace set out by international accords.

Usefully, the mayor of this city south of Los Angeles is seeking to inspire other municipalities and jurisdictions to do the same. Over the weekend mayors and council members from many U.S. and Canadian cities attended a conference in Irvine on its constructive approach.

Montreal, however, sent no political representative. City hall says it may recycle CFCs in city-owned air conditioners, but this is far too timid.

Canadian municipalities and provinces should act quickly because Ottawa is not devising — as it should — a comprehensive national program to hasten these chemicals' elimination. The longer the world carries the worse the damage to the ozone layer, which screens out harmful solar radiation.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said last year that simply to stabilize the ozone layer in its present weakened condition, global CFC emissions would have to be slashed by 85 per cent starting at once. Canada has agreed to ban them by the year 2000.

Meaningful action on the global environment does not depend only on grand international accords. It relies on millions of local people acting decisively.