EIA Comments at Air Resources Board Public Board Meeting to Consider the Proposed Final Short-Lived Climate Pollutant Reduction Strategy

March 23rd, 2017

Chairwoman Nichols and Honorable Board,

I am Christina Starr with the Environmental Investigation agency, an independent non-profit organization that has been working on the issue of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) for nearly a decade since first calling for an HFC phase-down under the Montreal Protocol back in 2008.

The Kigali Amendment neither changes nor reduces the need for California's continued leadership on HFCs. In fact, we need that leadership now more than ever. Strong and effective domestic policy here in the U.S. will be fundamental to supporting effective implementation of the Kigali Amendment globally.

Despite its broad support, we now face substantial uncertainty about the prospects for the U.S. Government to ratify and implement the Kigali Amendment. Furthermore, the global HFC phase-down schedule and current policies will not achieve emission reductions quickly enough to meet California's 2030 reduction target of 40% below 2013 levels.

Additionally, the federal regulatory and enforcement capacity of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) faces attack on multiple fronts that could weaken implementation. This includes legal challenges to both of the primary EPA programs used to regulate HFCs – the Significant New Alternatives Policy (or, SNAP) Program and the Refrigerant Management Program under Section 608 of the Clean Air Act.

Even if upheld, existing federal policies are insufficient to ensure a direct transition to truly low-GWP technologies. Instead, we risk locking in years of additional emissions from the remaining high-GWP HFCs and HFC blends that are still permitted even though proven low-GWP technologies are available.

For example, new supermarkets opening, and existing supermarkets replacing an old ozone depleting HCFC-22 system with new systems, are still permitted to use HFC-407C, a refrigerant nearly two thousand times as bad for the climate as carbon dioxide. With no additional policy actions, all of the 2,400 facilities in California with large commercial refrigeration systems that are still using HCFC-22 could convert to HFC-407C. Over their twenty-year lifetimes these new systems would contribute to additional HFC consumption of approximately 40 million metric tons of CO_2 equivalent, the same as running 12 coal fired power plants for one year. A ban on new stationary refrigeration equipment using HFCs above a GWP threshold of 150, such as that proposed in the SLCP Strategy, can avoid these additional emissions and much more.

Last October on the eve of Kigali, the Consumer Goods Forum, a leading group of global manufacturers and retailers that includes major U.S brand names like Target, Coca Cola, Wal-Mart, and Kroger issued a renewed voluntary commitment to just that- to use only refrigerants with a GWP below 150 in new commercial and industrial refrigeration systems. This further demonstrates the market readiness of this sector for these proposed measures.

Finally, we urge ARB to prioritize the proposed financial incentives to facilitate greater uptake of available low–GWP technologies before bans take effect. In addition to incentives for HFC reductions directly implemented by ARB, we urge further coordination and partnership with the California Energy Commission to roll out additional incentive programs through utilities targeting the substantial energy efficiency co-benefits of low-GWP refrigerants including ammonia, hydrocarbons, and CO_2. Such incentives have been successful in other countries including Spain, Japan and Canada, and have great potential to be standardized and scaled-up.

In closing, I reiterate our strong support for the proposed measures on HFCs and I urge the Board to approve the SLCP Strategy and proceed with implementing additional measures as soon as possible. Thank you for this opportunity and I look forward to continued engagement as the process moves forward.