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Irvine Sets Example in Move to Protect Ozone

Irvine's proposed restriction on compounds that deplete the ozone may not solve the critical global problem that products containing chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) cause, but it is a sincere and more than symbolic effort at least to control the release of the dangerous chemicals in one corner of the world.

Irvine is not the first governmental body to move toward control of CFCs. Other cities and some states have banned plastic foam food packaging that contains CFCs, and some have barred auto air conditioners and recharging cartridges that contain CFCs. But nobody here knows of an ordinance as comprehensive as the one under consideration in Irvine. A public hearing on the ordinance will be held June 29.

Mayor Larry Agran sees passage of the ordinance in Irvine as vital, not only because he believes that local agencies should accept their responsibility in protecting the global environment but also because he thinks that it could spur other levels of government to action. And it is fitting that Irvine lead the way. The city houses the largest concentration of industrial firms in the county. And it was UC Irvine chemistry professor F. Sherwood Rowland who pioneered the research that first discovered that CFCs used in spray cans were destroying the ozone layer.

The ozone-depleting problem is so serious that the world cannot really tolerate delays in ending the use of CFCs, which rise and erode the ozone that shields the Earth from deadly

ultraviolet rays. The erosion of the ozone greatly increases the rate of skin cancer and creates other health problems.

Safe substitutes need to be found

■ TRASH RECYCLING

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for chlorofluorocarbons now used in refrigerators and air conditioners. But in the meantime it makes sense to require the recycling of Freon gas while servicing such units rather than allowing the dangerous chemical to continue to escape into the air.

Bans, even local in nature such as what Irvine is proposing, could increase the pressure on industry to more quickly seek those substitutes. And the passage of local measures also could prompt state and regional governments and in turn the international community to act with the urgency and haste that the erosion of the ozone layer requires.

It would be far preferable to have the state Legislature, Congress and every other nation in the world take positive steps to end the use of CFCs. Thus far, 31 nations have pledged to do just that by the end of the century. But Irvine and Agran cannot be faulted for not wanting to sit around and wait for someone else to show the way while continued use of the harmful chemicals dangerously depletes the planet's ozone layer even more.