

# Press Release

American Chemical Society  
Office of Public Affairs



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## *FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*

### **American Chemical Society President Bassam Z. Shkhashiri Comments on the death and legacy of F. Sherwood Rowland**

WASHINGTON, March 13, 2012 — Bassam Z. Shkhashiri, Ph.D., president of the American Chemical Society, the world's largest scientific society, issued the following statement on the death and legacy of F. Sherwood Rowland, Ph.D., who shared the 1995 Nobel Prize in Chemistry. Shkhashiri is the William T. Evjue Distinguished Chair for the Wisconsin Idea at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Sherry Rowland will live on as a compelling reminder that individual scientists must speak out with courage and persistence when they think it is important for society to change. In doing so, they can have a tremendous impact on great global challenges. Sherry will endure as a role model for scientist-citizens, who have the responsibility to communicate such concerns in the years ahead.

The Nobel Prize committee said as much in recognizing Rowland, Mario Molina, Ph.D., and Paul Crutzen, Ph.D. "By explaining the chemical mechanisms that affect the thickness of the ozone layer, the three researchers have contributed to our salvation from a global environmental problem that could have catastrophic consequences."

That catastrophe was averted when manufacturers around the world phased out production of substances like the chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) in aerosol sprays and other products that Sherry and his colleagues linked to destruction of Earth's protective ozone layer. Without that shield, life would not exist on Earth. The first Rowland and Molina study linking CFCs to destruction of the ozone layer appeared in 1974 and drew scorn, ridicule and vicious personal attacks from skeptics. Einstein is quoted as having said that if he had one hour to save the world he would spend 55 minutes defining the problem and only five minutes finding the solution. It took Rowland and Molina a decade of persistence in the face of intense criticism and controversy.

Rowland recalled being shunned even by university chemistry departments, with invitations to lectures disappearing from 1975-1985. However, as chair of the ACS Fourth Biennial Conference on Chemical Education, I welcomed Sherry to the University of Wisconsin as plenary lecturer in 1976.

Eventually, their science was accepted, and it fostered worldwide action to avert an environmental disaster. Sherry's experience with ozone depletion made him a prominent voice for scientists concerned about another global problem — climate change. Let me recall what Rowland said at a White House roundtable on climate change in 1997: "Isn't it a responsibility of scientists, if you believe

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that you have found something that can affect the environment, isn't it your responsibility to do something about it, enough so that action actually takes place? If not us, who? If not now, when?"

The ACS' more than 164,000 members feel the loss of this great scientist, educator and champion of the environment, and we extend our heart-felt sympathy to Sherry's widow, Joan, and their family.

The American Chemical Society is a nonprofit organization chartered by the U.S. Congress. With more than 164,000 members, ACS is the world's largest scientific society and a global leader in providing access to chemistry-related research through its multiple databases, peer-reviewed journals and scientific conferences. Its main offices are in Washington, D.C., and Columbus, Ohio.

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**Summary:**

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**Keywords:**

Chemistry/Physics/Materials Sciences