

I welcome this inquiry. I am very concerned about urban pollution, particularly wood smoke from domestic wood heaters in the suburbs. One of my neighbours burns their fire 24 hours a day throughout winter and has done for many years. On a daily basis there is considerable visible smoke emitted from their chimney, which is clearly in breach of state regulations, yet penalties have never been applied because it is too hard to measure compliance and enforcement is historically non-existent.

The most serious consequence is the impact of constant exposure to smoke on our respiratory health. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the Department of the Environment and the CSIRO have provided estimates of around 3000 people dying in Australia each year as a result of urban air pollution. This is more than the number of fatalities caused by road accidents. Our child has a serious and chronic asthma condition for which daily steroid medications are required to keep her alive. During winter, the condition is aggravated by the cold air and the increase in wood smoke and associated particulate matter. Constant wood smoke from neighbouring properties has a direct impact on our daughter's health.

Last winter was worse for us from an air quality perspective, and I expect that this winter will be worse again. Last winter we saw more neighbours turn to wood fires for their heating due to the dramatic increase in electricity prices. We now have neighbours on both sides and two neighbours over the back fence using wood fires regularly, in addition to neighbours across the road also turning to wood fires. The occupants have not changed in the homes, just their heating practices, and with further increases in electricity prices this will become more common across the state. People starting to use fires again that have not been used for some years are at risk of house fires if they are using old fires or have not properly cleaned chimneys. In Taroona where I live and in other suburbs around Hobart, the smoke often hangs over houses that are sheltered from winds. For us this means that our street is often grey with smoke.

Soot is a particulate well known for causing respiratory problems and we know that soot is a product of wood combustion – indeed we are encouraged to have chimneys cleaned of soot each year to assist more efficient wood heater operation.

Through studies on the effects of smoking and working in industries where exposure to smoke or other particulates, research has shown us the very harmful effects of smoke on the lungs. The Australian Lung Foundation outlines the current situation leaves the government open to being responsible for lung disease and damage caused to residents who are exposed to unregulated wood smoke.

Not only is this a serious and significant public health issue, it is uncomfortable for my family compromising the amenity of our own property. Because of the constant smoke, we cannot enjoy our garden, we cannot use the washing line in winter and we cannot open our windows to enjoy fresh air.

While domestic wood smoke may not be the biggest contributor to poor air quality across the nation, it is a problem in urban areas, particularly for people living adjacent to a property that is constantly emitting the noxious products of fossil fuel combustion.

The current state legislation requires that domestic wood heaters do not emit smoke in a continuous stream of a certain length for a certain period of time. This is not a useful or quantitative way to measure pollution because it requires an untrained observer to stand in the cold monitoring for the specified period of time and it requires that there is little or no breeze and that the wind does not change direction for the duration so that from a distance the stream can be measured. It is very difficult to estimate the length of a smoke plume from a distance, particularly if it changes direction, which can mean having to stay outside in the cold for some time.

The sale or use of wood for domestic heaters is not regulated in Tasmania, so there are no controls over whether the wood is from an appropriate source or is dry, seasoned and suitable for clean combustion. Many houses have very old wood heaters that have not been checked for many years and certainly don't comply with recent regulations that cover new wood heaters. The Federal Government's 2004 audit of wood heaters in Australia found that most fail to meet air pollution standards

(<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2004/s1128403.htm>).

In Launceston Tasmania the Council launched a wood heater buy back program in 2001 (<http://www.launceston.tas.gov.au/lcc/?c=172>) with the specific intention of improving air quality in urban areas. This program was in direct response to the high incidence of respiratory disease in Launceston residents. The program continued for at least a decade (<http://www.tasgas.com.au/news/wood-heater-buy-back-project-2011/>)

The Lung Foundation of Australia resource **Woodsmoke and your Health: The Burning Issues** (<http://lungfoundation.com.au/lung-information/patient-resources/educational-resources/>) states that there is "no safe level of exposure to particle pollution" from wood smoke and that long-term exposure can be compared to tobacco smoking in terms of consequences, an obvious parallel.

I welcome Australian Government on ground action to deal with this problem, particularly with the rise electricity prices and the consequent increase in the use

of wood heaters in suburban homes.