

Air pollution Inquiry

Mr Doug Mckenzie

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

We are writing to the inquiry to ask for greater education and other measures to stop wood smoke air pollution.

We live in a beachside town in Victoria. Two of our neighbours have wood heaters and many people in our area are installing them – they are popular here and it seems many people feel they are a natural form of heating that suits a beach/bush environment. Some time ago we were also considering installing a wood heater ourselves.

However, since we have been living with wood smoke in our area and we have looked up research about the health consequences, we have become aware that the smoke they emit is at least as hazardous as cigarette smoke. We are shocked and alarmed that wood heaters can still be used in Victoria without restriction. The government needs to educate the community and should stop new heaters being installed.

Our neighbours have told us that their wood heaters are relatively new and meet all the proper standards and that they are careful with what they burn, and they are legally entitled to use their heaters whenever they want. However, both of these neighbours use them all day and in the evenings in Winter, and there is often smoke in our back yard, particularly when they are lit or when new wood is added. This affects our enjoyment of our home. We love our large garden but the smell of smoke often prevents us from enjoying gardening or sitting outside. If we hang washing outside it often smells of smoke. We have grandchildren with asthma, and when they visit we have to keep them indoors for most of the time as we are concerned about the impact on their asthma (as the research shows can be exacerbated by smoke).

The Victorian community needs to be much better informed about the potential impacts of wood smoke pollution. For people like us – who were considering purchasing one – we would have been entirely unaware of the risks they pose. As a former cigarette smoker, I have had respiratory issues and would have been particularly vulnerable to the health effects of wood smoke. But when we were considering purchasing a wood heater, we were provided with no information about this, and there is no warning label on wood heaters (unlike the highly visible labels on cigarettes). It is very difficult to find information about the impacts on health and most people would be surprised that wood smoke contains so many harmful substances. The Victorian government has a duty to educate the public about the risks of wood heater use, in the same way it has about smoking cigarettes.

We hope that this Inquiry results in the government taking far greater action to prevent wood heater use to protect the health of all Victorians.

Signature:

Doug McKenzie