

Air pollution Inquiry

Ms Karina Kanepe

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

My long standing struggle and major concern is with wood smoke pollution in the area where I live. My health has been and continues to be negatively affected by the smoke that fills my home and neighbourhood. This smoke comes from a minority of households (Darebin Council estimates 10% of households) burning wood-heaters or fire-pits and outdoor wood-fired pizza ovens/BBQs. I have asthma and ME, both of which are severely impacted and worsened by this chronic smoke exposure. The amount of smoke in our home daily is such that we have had to purchase three air purifying units - one for each main room - which we use day and night, often at the highest setting. The use of air purifiers, fans and air conditioner to help clear or flush the smoke out of our house easily comprises 30% and upwards of our energy use each year, which has imposed an economic cost on top of the health costs.

It is impossible to walk or exercise in our suburb and local parks without constantly breathing in smoke. I can't help but note that cigarette smoking is banned at our local primary school and kindergarten gate and drop off areas, but the houses with wood heaters directly across the road can have and do have their chimney smoke filling the school playground throughout the day in Autumn and Winter. The school's demountable classrooms are also filled with smoke. Likewise, cigarette smoking at our local train station is banned, but the train platform is constantly filled with smoke from nearby wood burning households.

Unfortunately, the reality is, certified wood-heaters burning properly dried wood (as per existing government regulation) are filling homes and neighbourhoods with smoke every day. People, overwhelmingly, stay silent about the smoke in their homes and on our streets because there is no help or redress to be found, with no local/state government support or action re this issue. In fact, councils have progressively made the reporting of wood smoke more difficult and cumbersome.

I am concerned about the wide held belief (misconception) that wood burning as a fuel = a source of clean/green energy. Wood-heaters/fire-pits/wood-fired pizza ovens and BBQs are also heavily and positively promoted in lifestyle magazines and on television make-over/lifestyle shows. At this point in time, this should be as retrograde as featuring or promoting cigarettes and cigarette smoking. Wood fire smoke is not a fringe issue affecting almost no-one (or no-one that matters). It is impossible to burn a wood fire in a built-up urban/residential environment and keep smoke out of neighbouring homes.

According to EPA Victoria, 50% and upwards of the air pollution/smog in Melbourne over the cooler months is attributable to wood fires. Additionally, "A new wood heater running at peak efficiency for 24 hours will emit as many particulates as an average car does in a year/15,000 km." - Dr. Karl Kruschelnitski, 21-3-21.

Australia has achieved a ginormous shift in attitudes/practice regarding cigarette smoke and smoking, providing a template for wood-heater/fire/smoke and air pollution, public health and community responsibility. Education is key but won't effect change without government regulation and enforcement.

I would like to see councils/state government officially and rigorously discourage the use of wood-heaters/fires as an immediate measure, as they do with cigarette smoking. Brighton & Hove City Council recently released a statement "asking people using wood burning stoves or lighting bonfires and fire-pits to

consider their neighbours and the most vulnerable members of your household before striking a match". I would like to see the gradual phase out of existing wood-heater/fire use in built-up urban/residential environments through education and stronger government enforcement around smoke emissions, with an immediate ban on the installation of new wood-heaters and a requirement that existing wood-heaters be removed when a house is sold into new ownership. Backyard fire-pits and bonfires should also be banned, as was done with general backyard burning decades ago.

We need to get to a place where wood burning, and the smoke (pollution) that comes from wood burning in built-up urban/residential environments, is as socially unacceptable as cigarette smoke/smoking currently is. A recent 2020 Asthma Australia survey found that 77% of Australians believe that new wood heaters should not be allowed in built-up urban environments.

Signature:

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