



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry: Inquiry into the Health Impacts of Air Pollution in Victoria

Hearing Date: 10 August 2021

Questions taken on notice

Directed to: Professor Brett Sutton, Department of Health

1. Dr Ratnam Page no. 16

Question asked.

We have also heard evidence around wood-fire heaters and the smoke pollution being so damaging to health. I was interested to know whether your office, potentially working with other agencies, was doing any work in terms of thinking about some of the initiatives, for example, in Launceston and Auckland, or

New Zealand, that we know have worked to reduce the number of wood-fire heaters that people use, given how bad the outcomes are.

Response:

The Department of Environment, Land Water and Planning (DELWP), along with the Environment Protection Authority (EPA), are the lead agencies for state and national policies concerning air quality and the impacts of air pollution on health including from wood heaters.

The Department of Health (DH) has a supportive and collaborative role with DELWP and EPA, both of whom may consult with DH on relevant air quality policy. An example of such a policy is an Air Quality Strategy for Victoria.

Smoke emissions from wood heaters is a significant issue and a concern for many people's health in Victoria. DELWP has advised that they are exploring initiatives undertaken in other jurisdictions to address wood heater smoke as part of the development of an Air Quality Strategy.

In relation to initiatives already underway in Victoria, I am aware that current government action to help address wood heater smoke in Victoria includes:

- The recently introduced \$335 million in rebates for 250,000 low income and vulnerable households to replace inefficient heating, including wood heaters, with energy efficient reverse cycle air conditioners. For further information, refer to the [media release](#) and website [Home Heating and Cooling Upgrades | Solar Victoria](#)



- EPA [guidance](#) on how to reduce smoke emissions from wood heaters, as good [operational practices](#) can, in many cases, significantly reduce the amount of smoke emitted.
- EPA information about [smoke impacts and actions](#) that can be taken, including the use of [portable indoor air cleaners](#).
- EPA promoting awareness about wood smoke and wood heaters across social media during autumn and winter.
- The recent establishment of 49 additional regional air monitoring sensors to EPA's air monitoring network across Victoria. These are on EPA's [AirWatch](#) site which includes health information and advice for each of the monitoring sites.
- DELWP and EPA are continuing to work with local government to explore ways of ensuring Councils can respond promptly and effectively to complaints.

You may also be interested in the current Victorian legislation for controlling wood heater smoke:

- The Environment Protection Regulations 2021 require wood heaters manufactured and sold in Victoria to comply with joint Australian/New Zealand emission and efficiency standards (AS/NZS 4012:2014 and AS/NZS 4013:2014).
- The installation of wood heaters is regulated by the Victorian Building Authority under the Plumbing Regulations 2018 which, for instance, specifies requirements for flue height. Under the regulations, installed wood heaters need to conform with AS/NZS 2918 Installation.
- People using wood heating must not cause a nuisance to their neighbours. Local councils are responsible for responding to reports of nuisances from wood heaters under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* and must investigate nuisance complaints.
- The new *Environment Protection Act 2017* will enhance the prevention of pollution. Under the general environmental duty (GED), all duty holders have a responsibility to minimise their risks — this includes the operation of solid fuel heaters. To assist with meeting the GED for wood heaters, EPA's website has information on the correct operation of solid fuel heaters to help households with wood heaters take practical steps to reduce smoke generated and what to do if people have concerns about smoke from a neighbour's wood heater. The guidance is currently being reviewed.

Any further questions regarding policies for wood heater smoke should be directed to the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.