

To: SCEW Secretariat

Subject: submission on wood heater CRIS

I live in the [REDACTED] area of Sydney. I chose to live near the coast in the hope that the fresh coastal air would help my chronic health condition. However, my condition is exacerbated by the woodsmoke that fills the air on winter evenings. I shut all my doors and windows and insert draughtproofing strips where possible. However, the smoke smell is so strong that it still fills the house despite these measures. The woodsmoke starts when it is dark so it is impossible to tell where it is coming from. Woodsmoke travels so far that it may come from a wide area of the neighbourhood.

The health hazards caused by woodsmoke are scientifically indisputable and the costs to public health are enormous.

It is indefensible that a person living in their own home should be subjected to health-destroying pollution and not be able to do anything about it. Enforcement tests by local councils based on visible smoke being reported in the neighbourhood are unworkable where woodsmoke occurs in the dark. In any event, a far more rigorous test is required for wood heaters as particles they emit below the visibility limit also cause a serious health risk.

There is no necessity for anyone to use wood heaters when smokeless heating methods are readily available. Only a tiny minority (4%) of Sydney's residents use wood heating but their actions account for over half Sydney's winter air pollution. It only takes one person using a wood heater to pollute an entire neighbourhood and cause a health hazard to all the people around. It is indefensible that the government continues to allow this when it is well aware of the health risks.

This is a problem that has to be addressed sooner or later and there is no point in the government putting off action while public health is put at risk for the sake of a small minority of woodheater users. Collaborative or voluntary measures will not suffice on their own as there is insufficient public understanding of the real health risks of woodsmoke and people are also generally not motivated to change their habits out of consideration for others.

My suggestions are as follows:

1. Ban all new wood heaters
2. Introduce a levy on wood fuel on a "polluters pay" principle.
3. Introduce a phase-out of wood heaters with subsidies for switching to smokeless heating (the levy on wood fuel would help fund this).
4. Introduce hard-hitting publicity to educate people of the real risks of woodsmoke.

If a standard can be set for wood heater emissions that can be shown not to affect public health, then wood heaters can be allowed but only if they comply with this standard.

There could also be exemptions for wood heater use in very low population areas or where other heating alternatives are not readily available.

With other public health risks in the past (eg cigarette smoking in work/public areas, use of asbestos materials), there was opposition to tighter regulation by industries with a financial interest in these products. This has also happened with wood heater regulation. However the government cannot allow the interests of the public and the rights of individuals not to be subject to pollution in their own homes to be overruled by the vested interests of wood heater manufacturers. In any event, if a safe standard for wood heater emissions can be found as discussed above, wood heater manufacturers can upgrade their models accordingly.

This matter cannot be put off any longer in this day and age when the health risks are known

and clean alternatives are readily available. The government must take immediate effective action to curtail this environmental and health problem.