

Portfolio/s: Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water**Air Quality - Recent Media**Recent Media

- The Guardian recently (14 November 2024) reported that three Australian cities were in the top 10 globally for the lowest levels of air pollution. Hobart (third) and Canberra (10th). This caused some debate amongst public health professionals.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/nov/14/hobart-darwin-and-canberra-ranked-among-top-10-global-cities-with-lowest-air-pollution>

Air Quality and Pollen public information

- The ACT Government's web page on Air Quality and Pollen, provides all the real time information on air quality, pollen counts, upcoming prescribed burning and health advice. <https://www.act.gov.au/health/topics/air-quality-and-pollen>

Chief Health Officers Report 2024

- The ACT Chief Health Officer has released a report regarding the health impacts of the 2019-20 bushfires.
- The report confirms the significant impact the fires had on our communities health and wellbeing. The report can be found on the ACT Health web site.

Air Quality

- The 2023 ACT Annual Air Quality Report prepared by the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) shows Canberra's air quality is very good with only one minor exceedance of the national health-based air quality standards for PM2.5 in winter in Monash and no exceedances for PM10, carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide and ozone at any of the ACT's monitoring stations.
- Annual average levels for particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10) associated with wood smoke remain at some of the lowest levels experienced in the past 10 years.

Burn Better Public Education Campaign

- The Government's annual 'Burn Better' public education campaign on how to correctly operate a wood heater to reduce smoke emissions will commence prior to winter 2025.

Bushfire Smoke and Air Quality Strategy

- On the 28 November 2023, the Assembly was updated on the achievements under the First Action Plan of the Bushfire Smoke and Air Quality Strategy 2021-25.
- The Government is review whether additional work is required.

Wood Heater Removal Program

- The Wood Heater Removal Program (WHRP) aims to improve the ACT's air quality by offering financial incentives for the removal and disposal of older high emission wood heaters.
- As of 19 November 2024, 1,336 wood heaters have been removed since the program commenced in 2004 with a projected health benefit of over \$6 million.
- EPSDD conducted a trial to replace wood heaters with an energy-efficient electric heating system in public housing properties from March to September 2024. Nineteen tenants participated in the trial.

Key Information

- Air quality monitoring is undertaken by ACT Health at three locations: Monash, Civic and Florey in accordance with the Ambient Air Quality National Environment Protection Measure (NEPM) under the *National Environment Protection Council Act 1994 (Act)*.
- ACT Health provides hourly advice to the public on the levels of these pollutant above the NEPM standards through the online Air Quality Index and AirRater App.
- The ACT Government has a range of programs to address emissions from domestic wood heaters, including:
 - regulation of commercial firewood, ensuring it's sold in a seasoned condition;
 - the prohibition of wood heaters in new development areas where planning studies show there would be an adverse impact on air quality (Dunlop, East O'Malley and the entire Molonglo Valley (except Wright);
 - rebates available through the Wood Heater Removal Program to facilitate removal of old inefficient heaters; and
 - the Burning Better public education campaign on how to correctly operate a wood heater.
- These initiatives have put the ACT at the forefront nationally in addressing wood smoke pollution and have resulted in a significant improvement in our air quality. Information about these initiatives and copies of the ACT Annual Air Quality Reports, can be found at www.accesscanberra.gov.au

Background

- The ACT monitors four of the six NEPM pollutants: Carbon monoxide (CO); nitrogen dioxide (NO₂); photochemical oxidants as ozone (O₃); particulate matter PM₁₀; and particulate matter PM_{2.5}.
- The ACT has never monitored sulphur dioxide (SO₂) as it is primarily an industrial pollutant, and the ACT does not have heavy industry. In 2002, lead monitoring ceased with the phase out of leaded petrol.

2023 Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment's Special Investigation Report into Wood Heater Policy in the ACT

- The Government has commenced work to consider phasing out domestic wood heaters in all urban areas to improve air quality and the health and wellbeing of Canberrans.
- The consideration to phase out wood heaters was prompted, in part, by the and a 2022 YourSay Panel survey exploring behaviours, motivators and barriers to removal and replacement of wood heaters which found:
 - 52% of the 1,955 respondents supported the gradual phase out of wood heaters
 - 59% of wood heater owners opposed the phase out of wood heaters
 - 89% of all respondents found air quality to be fair or poor
 - 73% of respondents indicated they were impacted by neighbours wood smoke
 - 72% respondents feel that wood heaters provide a unique source of warmth
 - 59% indicated they are enjoyable to use
 - 10% of the respondents own a wood heater and of those 5% use as their main heating source
- The Government has released its formal response to the Commissioner's investigation into wood heaters which supports the phase out subject to outcomes of air quality a regulatory impact assessment.
- The Government engaged environmental consultant's AECOM to undertake an air quality assessment for the ACT to inform its approach.
- The Government will also undertake a regulatory impact assessment to guide its decision. The government has allocated \$90,000 towards this body of work.
- The Government has passed legislation which will take effect in February 2025 that bans the installation of wood heaters that don't meet the current emission standards. This compliments the existing laws prohibiting the sale of these wood heaters in the ACT.