

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

- The [2023 ACT Annual Air Quality Report](#) prepared by the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) shows Canberra's air quality is very good. There was only one minor exceedance of the national health-based air quality standards for PM2.5 in winter at Monash. There were no exceedances for PM10, carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide and ozone at any of the ACT's three 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 aims to educate Canberrans about how to use their wood fire heaters responsibly to reduce smoke pollution in the ACT throughout the winter months.
- In 2024, the campaign ran from 27 May to 30 August with a budget of \$20,000.
- The campaigns received 3,953,164 impressions, and 3,164 clicks through to the website.
- The 2025 campaign will commence in May with a similar approach to last year's campaign.

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](#).
- Some key achievements include:
 - The government has strengthened its smoke plume modelling capabilities to better plan to mitigate the effects of bushfire smoke on the ACT community, particularly from prescribed burns.
 - The ACT's air quality website has been updated with a clearer and more interactive dashboard relating to air quality allowing the public to interrogate air quality data more easily, including on smartphones.
 - The Outdoor Smoke Health Impacts fact sheet has also been updated to incorporate information on ways to reducing smoke entering buildings.
 - WorkSafe ACT has developed a smoke, pollen and dust webpage that sets out the duties of persons conducting a business to ensuring the air quality in the workplace is safe. The webpage provides practical information on how employers can manage the risks of poor air quality caused by dust storms, pollen

and smoke and provides links to useful resources to assist businesses in assessing air quality such as the air quality index for the ACT.

- The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) has established a five-year \$5 million Building Energy Efficiency Upgrade Fund, to be accessed by community clubs. The Program provides rebates of up to \$75,000 per club to upgrade to more energy efficient appliances and energy systems. As part of the registration process for the Program, clubs also complete an 'Extreme Weather Plan' which outlines the measures clubs could implement to become an extreme weather refuge site.
- The new energy efficiency standards in the National Construction Code (NCC) 2022 are the first step to progress a 10-year pathway to shift to world's best practice on climate-ready and environmentally sustainable buildings. These new standards commenced in the ACT on 15 January 2024. The EPSDD has been progressing the scoping and planning works to support development of a roadmap that will set clear goals and ways of measuring, including commitments on gas transition and no new gas connections in greenfield areas.
- The ACT Government's Burn Right Tonight campaign was reviewed following public consultation and an updated Burn Better campaign launched over the 2023 winter. The campaign recognises that even with stricter emission standards for wood heaters, how they are used, is just, if not more important, as improper use can lead to significant smoke emissions. This public education tool has run every winter since 2011 to remind ACT wood heater owners on the correct storage of firewood and use of wood heaters to reduce their emissions.
- The Government is reviewing 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 25 March 2025, 1,346 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

- ACT Health monitor's the ACT's air quality at 3 locations at Monash, Civic and Florey.
- This is done in accordance with the Ambient Air Quality National Environment Protection Measure (NEPM) under the *National Environment Protection Council Act 1994* (Act). EPSDD is responsible for the legislation.

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- ACT Health provides hourly advice to the public on the levels of pollutants 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:
 - regulating commercial firewood to ensure it's sold in a seasoned condition
 - prohibiting the installation of wood heaters in new development areas where planning studies show there would be an adverse impact on air quality. This includes Dunlop, East O'Malley and the entire Molonglo Valley (except Wright)
 - rebates available through the Wood Heater Removal Program to remove old inefficient heaters; and
 - the Burn Better public education campaign to educate Canberrans about how to correctly operate a wood heater.
 - regulating the sale and installation of wood heaters to ensure they meet the current Australian Standards for emissions (AS4013) and efficiency (AS4012).
 - regulating emissions from domestic wood heaters.
- 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, are available on the [Access Canberra website](#).

Background

- The ACT monitors 4 of the 6 NEPM pollutants including 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.

Air Quality and Pollen public information

The ACT Government's [web page on Air Quality and Pollen](#), provides real time information on air quality, pollen counts, upcoming prescribed burning and health advice.

Phasing out wood heaters

- 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 [2023 Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment's Special Investigation Report into Wood Heater Policy in the ACT](#) and a 2022 YourSay Panel survey exploring

behaviours, motivators and barriers to remove and replace 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 and a regulatory impact assessments.
 - 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 and 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.

Burn Better Public Information Campaign

- The Burn Better campaign was previously called 'Burn Right Tonight', it was renamed to Burn Better in 2023 following a review of the campaign.