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**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

TENTH ASSEMBLY

**Bushfire Smoke and Air Quality Strategy 2021-25
First Action Plan Report**

**Presented by
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November 2023**

Bushfire Smoke and Air Quality Strategy 2021-25

First Action Plan Report (November 2023)

Objective	Action	Responsible Directorate	First Action Plan Report	Status
1 - Support the implementation of the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan to manage and reduce bushfire risks and consequences in the ACT	1. Review air quality monitoring approaches during fuel reduction burns as part of the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan.	JACS (ESA)	<p>The potential impact of smoke on the community is now embedded as a key consideration for planning and implementation of hazard reduction burns.</p> <p>Smoke plume modelling informs both operational decision making and community messaging.</p> <p>The ACT Rural Fire Service (ACTRFS) and Parks and Conservation Service (PCS) use the Prescribed Burn Decision Support Tool to measure smoke risk in sensitive areas including the urban environment. This tool is required by the Environmental Authorisation (license) under the <i>Environment Protection Act 1997</i> from the Environment Protection Authority to conduct this activity.</p> <p>ACT Health reports on air quality using up-to-date, accurate data on levels of pollutants in the air. Live monitoring is available to the public.</p>	Completed
2 - Strengthen measures to address the air regulations, including investigating and implementing measures to quality impacts of wood heaters	2. Investigate the utility and reliability of suburban air quality monitoring ACT Health use to collect data on the prevalence of wood smoke in suburban areas across Canberra.	ACT Health	The investigation on the utility and reliability of low-cost sensors has been completed and have been reported to the Ministers for Health and the Environment.	Completed
	3. Review and strengthen wood heater emissions standards (to 1 gram particulate matter/kg of firewood burnt from 1.5) via building regulations, including investigating and implementing measures to phase out wood heaters that do not meet standards.	EPSDD	<p>The government is considering proposed amendments to regulations to be progressed in 2024.</p> <p>Retail businesses, suppliers and manufacturers would need to clear existing stock (typical phase in 3-5 years), based on previous amendments to strengthen emissions standards through Australian Standard, AS/NZS 4013.</p> <p>EPSDD is a member of the national technical review committee, progressing the review of the wood heater emissions standards in AS/NZS 4013, which is seeking to reduce the emission standards to 1g/kg from the current 1.5g/kg.</p> <p>The Wood Heater Replacement Program is continuing to phase out wood heaters that do not meet current emission standards.</p>	Underway

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	4. Evaluate the Burn Right Tonight campaign; the Wood Heater Replacement Program; and the efficacy of measures to ensure that firewood sold is seasoned, sustainably sourced, and meets compliance with government recommended wood burning practices.	EPSDD	<p>EPSDD EPSDD Communications coordinated market research via an external agency in April 2022 and through the CMTEDD YourSay Community Panel in August 2022, which attracted 1,955 participants including wood heater owners. The research has evaluated and informed campaign messaging and program design. Insights gathered through program implementation has informed options put forward to relevant Ministers to run a trial to reduce the upfront costs for wood heater removal by low-income homeowners.</p> <p>Burn Right Tonight The 2022 Burn Right Tonight (BRT) campaign was in market from 6 June – 14 August. In-market updates were provided to the Minister fortnightly. The final evaluation was completed and circulated internally on 10 October 2022. Key summary points include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The paid campaign resulted in 2,064,821 impressions and 3,728 clicks. - The most engaged audience is 45-54 and 65+ with a mix of male and female across all channels. - We saw 83 articles and radio mentions of wood heaters during the campaign period. We cannot compare this to 2021, as the media portal only keeps content for 12 months. - We saw a 380 per cent increase in wood heater applications compared to 2021. - We saw a 904.76 per cent increase in traffic to the BRT webpage compared to 2021. - We saw a 255.56 per cent increase in traffic to the wood heater replacement page compared to the two months before the campaign (5 April – 5 June). We cannot compare this to 2021, as the Everyday Climate Choices website did not exist. <p>The information gained was used to redesign the campaign which was launched over the 2023 winter as Burn Better.</p> <p>Burn Better The 2023 Burn Better campaign, formerly known as Burn Right Tonight, was in market over two bursts from 4 May-4 June (burst 1) and 5 June-31 August (burst 2). The campaign messaging was expanded this year to include messaging about illegal logging/taking wood from our parks and reserves, and a name change to Burn Better. Burst 1 focused on the key message ‘don’t cut down our parks and</p>	<p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p>

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			<p>reserves' and burst 2 focused on the key message 'reduce air pollution by burning right tonight'.</p> <p>Key summary points include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Burst 1 of the paid campaign resulted in 667,109 impressions and 1,202 clicks. - The most engaged audience was males aged 35-40. - Burst 2 of the paid campaign resulted in 2,440,516 impressions and 3,144 clicks. - The most engaged audience was males aged 25-34. - Overall, there were 69 media articles and radio mentions of wood heaters during the campaign period. In 2022 there were 83 media articles and radio mentions. - There were 8,549 views of the Burn Right Tonight webpage by 5,634 individual users. <p>Wood Heater Replacement Program Provides eligible households a rebate for removing or replacing a wood heater with an efficient electric heating system. Approximately 1,300 wood heaters have been replaced since the Program launched in 2004. Wood heaters removed in the past three financial years are:</p> <p>2021-22 - 24 2022-23 - 33 2023-24 – 12 (as at 15/11/2023)</p> <p>Environment Protection Authority, Access Canberra The sale and supply of firewood in the ACT is regulated under the Environment Protection Regulation 2005 (Regulation). Under Section 14 (2) of the Regulation merchants must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not supply unseasoned timber; • give each buyer a pamphlet supplied by the Environment Protection Authority that sets out recommended wood burning practices; and • give each buyer information regarding the common name and species (if known) of the wood, the place from which the wood was originally taken and the kind of wood e.g., Spotted Gum, Mogo State Forest, residue from forestry operations. <p>Compliance with these conditions is audited annually for ACT based merchants. The provision of the information in the last dot point enables the consumer to make an informed decision regarding their purchase.</p>	<p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p>

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3 - Enhance air quality monitoring and forecasting	5. Investigate and implement air quality forecasting systems.	ACT Health	ACT Health has access to NSW forecasting service, which incorporates the ACT in its modelling.	Completed
	6. Investigate the feasibility, utility, reliability and potential ongoing costs of a low-cost air quality sensors network.	ACT Health	Report on the reliability of low-cost sensors completed and reported to Ministers of Health and the Environment.	Completed
4 - Consider the impact of air quality associated with bushfire smoke through all phases of the emergency management continuum	7. Provide a single point of truth for bushfire preparedness information including communication on smoke management.	JACS (ESA)	Be Emergency Ready continues to be updated and provide advice and guidance to the public on bushfires and their consequences. Where relevant links to ACT Health advice websites are provided. In the event of bushfire smoke impacting the ACT, information on smoke impact is collaboratively developed by the ESA Public Information Team in conjunction with the ACT Public Information Coordination Centre and ACT Health and broadcast to ensure a single point of truth. This information is included on the ESA Website during emergencies.	Completed
	8. Identify and support smoke refuges, including by supporting clubs to become heat and smoke refuges for local communities. This will include ensuring appropriate air filtration systems, and financial payments for venues designated as official extreme weather refuge sites.	JACS	<p>The <i>Gaming Machine (Club Refuge) Amendment Act 2022</i> was passed by the Legislative Assembly on 28 June 2023.</p> <p>The Act made amendments to the <i>Gaming Machine Act 2004</i> and Gaming Machine Regulation 2004 to support clubs to become club refuges for local communities during a heat or smoke event.</p> <p>It is expected that this measure will be in place by the end of 2023, noting there is a higher risk of heat and smoke events over summer.</p>	Completed
	9. Progress the ACT Climate Change Strategy 2019-2025, including development of a Climate-wise building Code	EPSDD	<p>Excellent progress is being made on the ACT Climate Change Strategy 2019-2025.</p> <p>In the area of climate-wise development, the new planning system released in September 2023 includes a significant number of new climate-wise elements.</p> <p>Budget funding has also been received for further work which is likely to include assessing whether the planning system suitably addresses climate change in regard to natural hazards and disaster risk.</p>	Underway

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			Codes have been replaced by other tools in the new planning system.	
5 - Support the development of buildings that are resilient to air pollution	10. Progress the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement commitment to commence a 10--year pathway to shift to worlds best practice on climate-ready and environmentally sustainable buildings and consider appropriate changes to building standards in the ACT including working with the ABCB to consider changes to the National Construction Code.	EPSDD	<p>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.</p> <p>These new standards will commence in the ACT on 15 January 2024. The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) has been progressing the scoping and planning works to support development of a roadmap that will set clear goals and ways of measuring.</p> <p>The scoping work has included a mapping exercise of all existing policies, programs and commitments across the ACT Government to inform identification of opportunities for additional measures.</p> <p>Work on development of a roadmap has commenced. The ACT Government, in particular EPSDD, has been progressing and working on a number of initiatives that support climate-ready and environmentally sustainable buildings, including commitments on gas transition and no new gas connections in greenfield areas. The ACT's Building Regulatory System is one of many tools utilised to progress these commitments.</p>	Underway
	11. Progress the ACT <i>Living Infrastructure Plan</i>	EPSDD	<p>Several actions in the Living Infrastructure Plan have been completed and strong progress is being made on others. For example, the <i>Tree Protection Act</i> is being replaced by the <i>Urban Forest Act 2023</i>, which was passed in the Assembly in March 2023 and will commence on 1 January 2024.</p> <p>Budget funding has been received for a 2025 data collection and analysis to provide tree canopy and permeability estimates to assess progress on the Plan's 30% tree canopy (or equivalent) and permeability targets.</p>	Underway
	12. Establish a five-year \$5 million Building Energy Efficiency Upgrade Fund, to be accessed by community clubs	EPSDD	The Community Clubs 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. Under the PAGA the government also agreed to support clubs to become heat and smoke refuges for local communities (E10). Twenty clubs have participated to date and provided their Extreme Weather Plan.	Completed

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			EPSDD collect this information and provides to Justice and Community Safety Directorate who are currently working on the policy design.	
6 - Support the Health and Wellbeing of Canberrans affected by bushfire and woodfire smoke	13. Consider available health data and information related to the impacts of natural disasters, including mental health.	ACT Health / Office of Mental Health	<p>ACT Health The Epidemiology Section has been working with researchers from the PATH (Personality and Total Health) Through Life Study (PATH Study). The PATH Study is a longitudinal study of people living in the ACT and Queanbeyan and was in the field during and after the 2019-20 bushfires.</p> <p>Two reports focusing on the qualitative experiences and the physical and mental health effects of the bushfires on older adults are expected to be finalised in early 2023.</p> <p>Office of Mental Health Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing has developed an approach to monitoring the mental health impacts of disasters across a range of data sources. This has largely been driven by the pandemic but will be able to be applied to other disasters as needed.</p>	Completed
	14. Update public health messaging to provide clear and consistent information on managing anxiety and mental health and wellbeing during periods of severe bushfire smoke and hazardous air quality.	ACT Health	<p>ACT Health 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</p> <p>ACT Health made further updates to the air quality website in 2023 to make the dashboards more accessible on smartphones.</p> <p>Office of Mental Health The ACT Health Directorate and Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing have developed mental health messaging related to the bushfires and subsequently to pandemic which will be able to be applied to other disasters as needed. There will be a need to respond to the unique circumstances for each event but the broad approach and key messages will be drawn together.</p>	Completed
	15. Inform the community on ways to reduce the amount of smoke entering buildings.	ACT Health	The Outdoor smoke – Health Impacts fact sheet has been updated to incorporate this information. This is available on the website.	Completed
7 – Provide targeted support to vulnerable populations and workers during	16. Undertake a detailed review to ensure that information regarding	ACT Health / JACS	<p>ACT Health ACT Health provides targeted health advice and information for at risk groups during severe air pollution events. ACT Health works closely with relevant government directorates and emergency</p>	Completed

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severe air pollution events	vulnerable people can be appropriately accessed, provided and used during an emergency event.		<p>agencies, including CSD and JACS, and non-government organisations to reach these groups.</p> <p>ESA</p> <p>The ESA supports vulnerable populations and workers during severe air pollution events through targeted support.</p>	Completed
	17. Develop specific guidance material to help employers and industry manage the risks of bushfire smoke in the workplace	CMTEDD / WorkSafe ACT	<p>Worksafe ACT has developed a Smoke, pollen and dust webpage that sets out the duties of persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) in regard to ensuring the air quality in the workplace is safe.</p> <p>The webpage gives 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 PCBUs in assessing air quality such as the air quality index for the ACT.</p> <p>Worksafe ACT also publishes the Managing risks of hazardous chemicals in the workplace Code of Practice that provides general information on how to identify, assess and control hazards relating to hazardous chemicals.</p> <p>In January 2022, WorkSafe ACT launched its Strategy for Preventing Occupational Lung Diseases 2021-2023. Part of this strategy involves raising awareness of exposures that cause occupational lung diseases through general and targeted awareness campaigns.</p> <p>Work has commenced by the Work Safety Group, Office of Industrial Relations and Workforce Strategy in CMTEDD in consultation with the ACT's Work Health and Safety Council to consider developing further guidance material to support persons conducting a business or undertaking meet their work health and safety duties for workers exposed to the risks of smoke and heat.</p> <p>The ACT's Work Health and Safety Council comprises representative members from employer/industry and employee bodies.</p>	Completed
8 - Provide economic supports to businesses, communities and individuals affected by severe bushfire smoke	18. Engage with the Commonwealth-led review of the existing Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DFRA), including application processes, eligibility	JACS / CMTEDD	<p>The Justice and Community Safety Directorate is working closely with the Commonwealth Government on the DRFA review to ensure it can be utilised by the ACT community following a disaster. This includes as members on the DRFA Review Stakeholders Group and National Consistency Workshops to determine definitions and eligibility criteria for funding packages.</p>	Underway

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	and focus (i.e. Category D).		<p>JACS is also engaged with the Commonwealth instigated Independent Review into Commonwealth Disaster Funding.</p> <p>Note: the ACT may not be eligible to claim DRFA reimbursement for supports provided to those affected by bushfire smoke if the bushfire is not within the ACT region. Supports however can still be provided without an application to the DRFA.</p>	
	19. Coordinate with Australian, state and territory governments to broaden the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements to encompass funding for recovery measures that are focused on resilience, including in circumstances which are not 'exceptional'.	JACS / CMTEDD	<p>Through the DRFA Review Stakeholders Group, JACS is working with the Commonwealth Government to ensure resilience measures are supported through the funding. The ACT is supportive of opportunities to increase resilience of the ACT across all domains of recovery.</p> <p>In addition, JACS is working with ACTIA on how to manage the conflict between the principles of betterment and the insurance practice of 'like for like' replacement.</p>	Underway
	20. In consultation with Australian, state and territory governments, evaluate the effectiveness of existing financial assistance measures to inform the development of a suite of pre-effective pre-determined recovery supports.	JACS / CMTEDD	<p>This work is being considered as part of the DRFA Review, with JACS advocating for the specific needs of the ACT community following a disaster. This has included ensuring that the ACT is not excluded from funding streams aimed at local councils and ensuing threshold levels are not restrictive to the ACT.</p> <p>JACS is also engaged with the Commonwealth instigated Independent Review into Commonwealth Disaster Funding.</p>	Underway