



Pollution Experts Fired Up Over “Toxic” Wood Heater Smoke

Smoky and heavily polluting wood-fired domestic heaters may be on the way out, under sweeping changes recommended by the country’s top air quality scientists.

Researchers at the Centre for Air pollution, energy and health Research (CAR) released a position paper today calling for tough new wood heater regulations to protect the health of Australians.

The experts recommend the introduction of buyback schemes to incentivise Australians to switch out their wood heaters for heat pumps. They also recommend stricter regulations and a requirement for all such heaters to be registered.

“Wood heater smoke is one of the biggest contributors to air pollution in many parts of Australia, as highlighted by recent studies in NSW and Tasmania,” says CAR Investigator Professor Fay Johnston, from the University of Tasmania’s Menzies Institute for Medical Research. “Australians are nostalgic about the ‘cosy’ family hearth they provide, but collectively, these heaters are actually damaging peoples’ lungs and hearts with toxic smoke. It’s time to put in place measures to address the problem.”

One in ten Australian households use wood heaters as their main source of heating. The smoke poses a danger, particularly to vulnerable populations, like pregnant women, babies, older people, and those living with asthma, COPD, diabetes, or heart disease.

The National Clean Air Agreement acknowledges the need for a reduction of emissions from wood heaters as part of its strategic approach, but there is no formal national policy on reducing wood heaters emissions.

The paper highlights the key reasons that little progress has been made in addressing the problem. “One major issue is that current wood heater standards don’t adequately protect health, and can’t be easily enforced,” Professor Johnston explains. “Unfortunately, education campaigns alone don’t improve air quality.”

On top of that, there is a widespread misconception that wood heaters are cheaper to run than less polluting, healthier alternatives, like heat pumps. “That might be the case for the small number of people with their own wood supply, but certainly not for most households,” Professor Johnston says.

The paper makes six key recommendations to target the health impacts of wood heaters:



1. State (and Territory) regulations with strong compliance and enforcement mechanisms and sufficient resourcing to support local governments to address local wood heater smoke.
2. Improved measurement and monitoring of air quality across Australia to protect the health of all Australians.
3. The introduction of schemes to incentivise the replacement of wood heaters in existing homes and discourage the inclusion of wood heaters in new homes in populated areas.
4. The introduction of rigorous emissions standards for “real world” heater operation.
5. National leadership on driving wood heater emission reductions by revitalising the central wood heater register.
6. The introduction of well-funded, comprehensively implemented, and evaluated public health promotion programs.

The release of the position paper coincides with the development of clean air strategies and the revision of air pollution regulations in both NSW and Victoria. The document, entitled *Reducing the health impacts of wood heaters in Australia*, [can be viewed here](#).

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About CAR

The Centre for Air pollution, energy and health Research (CAR) is a National Health and Medical Research Council Centre for Research Excellence in Australia. It is the only group of its kind nationally to bring together researchers focusing on the impacts of air pollution and new versus traditional forms of energy on our health. Our vision for a healthier community is the driving force behind our research.