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Doctors and Scientists Against Wood Smoke Pollution (DSAWSP, woodsmokepollution.org) is an international organization that aims to save the health, and lives, of all who are affected with wood smoke.

We would like to be informed via email about how we can be involved in improving air quality in NSW -- this is a very important public health issue.

The most health-hazardous pollutant in our air (responsible for more premature deaths than any other pollutant) is PM2.5 pollution -- fine particles less than 2.5 millionth of a meter that penetrate into the deepest recesses of our lungs where they can enter the bloodstream and transport toxins to every organ of the body, including the brain.

The Clean Air for NSW Consultation paper shows that residential wood heating emits more PM2.5 in Sydney than any other human activity, despite being used by less than 5% of households in the city as the main form of heating.

Launceston's successful woodsmoke program reduced wintertime deaths from respiratory disease by 28% and cardiovascular disease deaths by 20%. Year round, for men, the reductions were 23% (respiratory), 18% (cardiovascular) and 11.4% (all deaths). The focus was on explaining the health effects of woodsmoke pollution and replacing wood stoves with non-polluting heating.

NSW Chief Medical Officer Kerry Chant said wood heaters are so detrimental to health she supports banning and phasing them out in built-up urban areas. When Launceston residents became aware of the health damage from woodsmoke, the vast majority chose to switch to non-polluting heating. In all NSW climate zones, non-polluting alternatives have lower running costs than buying firewood and cause less global warming.

Most people who understand the health damage from breathing woodsmoke support the recommendation of NSW's top doctor. They know that there is no safe level of PM2.5 pollution and that new wood stoves typically emit more PM2.5 per year than 1000 passenger cars. DSAWSP also supports Chief Medical Officer Kerry Chant’s recommendation.

The NSW EPA should therefore implement the NSW Chief Medical Officer's recommendation not to allow new wood heaters in urban areas, require existing stoves to be removed before houses are sold, and phase out remaining wood stoves within 7 years. The policy should include:

- Effective education programs to alert families to the health damage from woodsmoke pollution and the low cost of switching to non-polluting alternatives.
- Protection for residents affected by other people's woodsmoke
Financial assistance so that low-income families can switch to non-polluting heating

We would also like to point out that the statement in the NSW Consultation paper, "It is proposed that changes to the wood heater regulatory framework will adopt the updated Australian/New Zealand Standards for new wood heaters, which set more stringent emission limits and new efficiency limits" is misleading and should be corrected. A large proportion of heaters that meet the current Australian standard are considered so polluting that it is illegal to install them in any urban area in New Zealand. In fact, their use would be illegal in many areas of New Zealand affected by wood smoke. The concept of updated "Australian/New Zealand Standards" that are so polluting they were rejected by the New Zealand government in 2005 is extremely confusing.

New Zealand research demonstrates the importance of not allowing new heaters to be installed, even those with an emissions limit of 1.0 g/kg. Real-life emissions were measured on 4 heaters in Christchurch with emissions ratings < 1.0 g/kg. The real-life average was 9.5 g/kg, a 10-fold increase on the lab test results based on the official Australian/NZ standards test. The real-life average for heaters with emissions ratings < 1.0 g/kg was actually greater than real-life emissions of heaters in Launceston in 2006 and 2007, which averaged 9.4 g/kg. Replacing existing heaters with non-polluting heating is a much more effective strategy than any further research into the effect of tinkering with requirements based on a test that does not reflect real-life emissions.

Policies based on the chief medical officer's recommendation are the quickest and most cost-effective way to clean up the air and prevent hundreds of premature deaths every year.

We therefore urge the authorities in NSW to implement the recommendations of the NSW Chief Medical Officer as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Brian Moench, MD
Board Chair, Doctors and Scientists Against Wood Smoke Pollution

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