

Wood heaters and health

A Centre for Safe Air fact sheet



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How many people are harmed?

- Smoke from wood heaters is among the largest contributors to air pollution-related illness and premature death in Australia.
- In 2015, wood heater pollution was linked to an estimated 720 premature deaths in Australia at a cost equivalent to more than \$3B.
- That is more smoke-related harm than Australia experienced during the unprecedented 2019-20 bushfire season.



What is in wood heater smoke?

- Wood smoke contains hundreds of toxic compounds, gases and airborne particles, similar to cigarette smoke.
- Many of these toxins are recognised carcinogens.



How does wood heater pollution affect health?

- Microscopic particles in wood smoke enter the bloodstream through the lungs, affecting every organ in the body.
- **Short-term**, the body responds to inhaled smoke by activating its immune and defence systems. This can make existing health problems like asthma or heart disease worse, increasing demand on health care services.
- **Long-term**, the more smoke people breathe, the greater their risk of developing cancer, dementia, infertility, diabetes, heart disease, lung conditions like asthma, and many other chronic diseases.



Towards smoke-free heating

Cleaner heating can unlock enormous health and economic benefits, but governments need to act through a combination of:

- **Education** about the health impacts of smoke on individuals and the community.
- **Financial support** for smoke-free heating and energy efficient homes.
- **Regulation** of where and when wood heaters can and cannot be safely used.
- **Stronger standards** for wood heater smoke emissions and a testing protocol that reflects real-world usage
- **Enforcement** of wood heater smoke regulations and standards.

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