

Ms Kerry Scott  
Project Manager  
NEPC Service Corporation  
Level 5 / 81 Flinders St  
Adelaide SA 5000  
[kscott@ephc.gov.au](mailto:kscott@ephc.gov.au)

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Attn Ms Kerry Scott

**Re: Ambient Air Quality NEPM Review – DISCUSSION PAPER**

I live in Northcote Victoria, and have a personal interest in the matter of ambient air quality. I have read the Discussion Paper and wish to comment on the impacts of particle pollution on my family, and the inadequate options available to address this.

**My experiences with particle pollution**

I have two direct neighbours with wood heaters who use them as their sole source of heating. Neither neighbour uses any other form of heating, because both believe that wood heaters are a cheap form of heating. Often the smoke begins at 9am and continues through until 1am in the morning. On still winter days the smoke sits like a fog around our house.

I have two young children - a three year old and five year old (who has recently been diagnosed with asthma). Our three year old has a chronic cough and wheeze and this is being investigated by our GP as possible asthma. My house is only metres from my neighbours and there is very little we can do to avoid the smoke.

**Health concerns**

I am concerned about the respiratory problems which have developed in our young children. The research I've read suggests that wood smoke affects the lung development of children, and is particularly of concern for people doing outside exercise, as they can breathe the particles deep into their lungs. The potential effects of small particle pollution include heart disease and lung cancer. I note that your discussion paper summarises these research findings. For example, your paper finds '*Children may be at greater risk from long-term exposures to particles or other air pollutants because the growth and development of the respiratory system may be permanently affected by early environmental insults.*' p.98. These findings are of particular concern to me.

In addition I have had significant exposure to asbestos as a child (my father was a manual labourer who died from mesothelioma, and I regularly accompanied him to work), and as you may know continued exposure to the organic chemical emissions and smoke particles greatly increase the risk of developing mesothelioma (for those who have been exposed to asbestos).

I have been looking into research into small particle pollution (PM2.5). Just as there is no safe threshold level for exposure to tobacco smoke or to asbestos, there is no threshold that is safe for wood smoke exposure.

**Responses from local authorities**

I have followed all the avenues available to reduce the amount of smoke coming from my neighbour's chimney. I have involved the local council (Darebin) who could only offer my neighbour advice and written material on correct operation of his wood heater. I have organised for my neighbour's wood heater cleaned, at our own expense. I have paid for and given my neighbour a device, known as Smart Burn, which is supposed to reduce emissions.

Despite these measures, the smoke continues and we rarely use the back yard because of the smoke. Even with the doors and windows shut it is common to smell smoke in our house.

I have offered to pay my neighbour to replace his wood heater but unfortunately he likes his wood heater and doesn't believe that there is a link between wood smoke and asthma or any other health problems. And while there is little official information to the general public about the health effects of wood smoke, then who can blame him.

In 2008 I wrote to the Minister for the Environment and Climate Change, Gavin Jennings (Victoria). As a result of my letter a meeting was organised with the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) in Victoria. In my meeting with the EPA, they acknowledged that wood smoke pollution was a concern but informed me that the government is not particularly interested in the issue and given the general public indifference it is unlikely that there would be any pressure to review the current approach to wood smoke. The EPA suggested the best solution for me would be to move house.

Despite this lack of interest from the EPA, encouragingly the Victorian State of the Environment Report 2009 identified wood smoke from wood heating as a significant health and environment issue and recommended that wood heaters be phased out in built up environments. This is yet to happen. The Brumby government's response to this recommendation has been to say they will look into the impact on industry.

#### **My comments on the Discussion Paper**

I note that the review of the Ambient Air NEPM is considering whether "ambient air quality allows for the adequate protection of human health and wellbeing". Currently I do not believe this is the case at all.

I have approached all local authorities, but have found that the options available to reduce the risk of particle pollution for myself and my children are totally inadequate.

I believe there is significant evidence available about the health impacts of small particle pollution. I do not believe that our family or community is being adequately protected from this form of pollution.

New standards and protection measures should be considered to reduce the impact of small particle pollution.

Thankyou for the opportunity to comment

Liz Poole  
Northcote 3070 VIC

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