



Respiratory Care WA

Asthma | COPD | Respiratory Health



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Wood Smoke and Asthma

This information sheet provides information on how air pollution can be minimised from wood heating and incinerators so that the effect on people with asthma is also minimised.

Autumn and winter fires can be a real problem for some people with asthma who are sensitive to smoke from wood fires. Whilst they can avoid such heating inside their own home, many people are affected by chimney smoke from their neighbours' homes.

The only legislation on chimney exhausts from domestic residences is enforced by local government authorities. Slow combustion stoves can be a problem, but there is a design code being developed for these by ANZECC and the Australian Standards Association that will set standards for emission levels.

Some useful tips on how to use wood heaters properly, getting the most benefit for heating whilst minimising air pollution include:

- Burn only dry, well seasoned wood - not treated wood;
- Store wood in a criss-cross fashion to keep it dry;
- Add larger pieces of wood only after a bed of red hot coals has been established;
- Build small fires regularly and provide plenty of air rather than one large, smouldering fire with the air controls turned down;
- Open the air controls after every addition of wood until the wood is burning well;
- Don't pack your fire and leave it on a low setting while you go out;
- Check your chimney for smoke - there will be some smoke when you start and refuel your fire but this should last no longer than 10-20 minutes;
- Insulate your home, close doors and curtains to conserve heat, but allow enough fresh air for efficient combustion;
- Make sure your chimney complies with the minimum requirements - at least 1 metre higher than any other structure within 15 metres; and
- Make sure the heater is the right size for its purpose and properly installed.

The Environmental Protection Authority shares our concerns about the possible adverse health effects of pollutants, particularly smoke which is known to contain gaseous pollutants as well as very small irritant particles that can be inhaled. They have worked with local governments to minimise or eliminate incinerators and open burning.

Although outdoor air quality has improved significantly in recent years, photochemical smog and particulate pollution are still of concern. The smog alerts on days of forecast high pollution potential issued by the Environmental Protection Authority can be very useful for those people with asthma who are sensitive to such pollution.