

Letter to the Editor
10/9/2008

Smoke pollution

Albert Van Zetten is quoted as saying wood heaters and open fires account for 85 percent of particle pollution released in Launceston (Launceston Advertiser 3/9/2008).

Not true according to the Environment Division's air monitoring web site. It says the figure is 65 percent. One would imagine it could even be much lower than this figure, as 2000 wood heaters have been replaced under the successful buy back scheme. If the percentage figure hasn't dropped, then it would be fair to say the scheme hasn't worked.

So where is the rest of the smoke coming from that fills the Tamar Valley? Albert's words, "particle pollution released in Launceston" are a clue, because it is important to realise what pushes the wood heater background pollution level up, is in fact the foreground smoke coming into Launceston from forestry planned burns.

People have commented on just how clear the air is in Launceston recently, even though it has been chilly and people have been using their heaters flat out. Doesn't that tell you something?

It is true we have had two breaches of air quality standards this year. I seem to recall Launceston had an extremely serious breach of our PM10 standards back on March 17 when no wood heaters were being used. We know the cause was forestry burn offs. As for the other breach mentioned on July 23; this smoke didn't come from wood heaters in Launceston. The smoke was thick right though out the Tamar Valley and I was informed at the time by the Environmental Health Department, the burn causing it was believed to be on the George Town/Bridport Road.

The heater buy back scheme is working and yet it comes as no surprise when the CEO of the Asthma Foundation (Cathy Beswick) says the Health and Human Services 2008 Indicator reported Northern Tasmania had the highest regional hospitalisation rates for asthma (Examiner September 3) and she even mentioned poor air quality.

Enough is enough; the real cause of our smoke pollution must stop. There are smokeless ways for the forestry industries to get rid of their waste and to reduce the build up of fuel loads to prevent wild fires. Air curtain destructors, masticators or slow pyrolysis can all be used to prevent smoke, and forestry should be made to use them.

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Thank you.