

# Simple tools to measure air quality

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Because when you cannot breathe, nothing else matters

We have seen terrible smoke-outs in many mainland states as a result of bushfires. People are suffering eco-anxiety. When you can't breathe, nothing else matters.

Wood smoke is primarily made up of PM2.5 fine particulates and they have a toxic effect as they pass through the lungs, into the bloodstream and then into body organs causing many horrific diseases.

Mainland states and territories need to turn to Tasmania when it comes to looking after their **air quality**.

Tasmania got the jump in this area because it unfortunately experienced deliberate burning by our forest industries for more than 50 years.

This was vigorously fought and resulted in the introduction of the Co-ordinated Smoke Management Strategy. We have also regulated wood heating to comply with AS/NZS wood heating standards; and backyard burning.

Although Tasmania has the worst health record in the nation in many areas, I do believe we have the best **air quality** regulations and monitoring in Australia.

Other state regulators are catching up but they still fiddle around with something known as an **Air Quality** Index (AQI) to release to the people. Environment Protection Authority Tasmania sticks to real-time raw data straight off the **air** monitoring instruments.

Primarily all Joe Blow in the street needs to know is the PM2.5 reading and where the wind/smoke is coming from and how fast during a bushfire. A stacked plot will indicate this.

Clean **air** is deemed to be less than 5ug/m<sup>3</sup>. Anything above that will affect all people because there is no minimum safe level of exposure.

There is no need for complex computations using additional parameters, or any fancy graded colour explanations to tell us things are worse than unhealthy.

Dispense with all this in these other states to make a real improvement to climate change. If you really feel colours are needed, make it green for clean **air** below 5ug/m<sup>3</sup> and red for all other unhealthy **air** above.

We don't need complexity at a time like this if we are going to make a difference with climate change.

Provide more real-time PM2.5/PM10 monitors and get the information out there so people can simply track the point source of fires and watch smoke travel as Tasmanians do.

EPA Tasmania has a network of 35 fixed monitoring stations (BLANkET) that people can log on to and track the latest 10 minute real-time readings. Uptime would be running close to 100 per cent so it is available when most needed.

EPA Tasmania has the ability to do additional mobile **air quality** monitoring at short notice (this was used around Morwell in Victoria during the coal mine fire) and it has other low-cost monitors that can be slotted into the gaps.

Tasmania's Department of Health also provides real-time **air quality** readings and flags PM2.5 exceedances on a rolling one-hour average, not the 24-hour average.

Launceston's Clive Stott previously worked in state health and started cleanairtas.com in 2008.