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News

Doctors warn on Tamar pulp mill smoke after WHO report

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Pulp mill smoke contains fine particles that can be deadly, according to the World Health Organisation.

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NEW World Health Organisation findings that fine wood smoke particles are killers have added to safety concerns around the proposed Tamar Valley pulp mill.

Launceston doctors James Markos and David Strong today told a press conference the new

evidence released by the WHO last October meant recent State Government legislation to extend the pulp mill's permit was untenable because lives could be at stake.

Dr Markos said by burning its wood waste to produce energy the mill would pour a lot of extra wood smoke into the Tamar Valley's unique inversion layer, which prevents smoke from blowing away.

He said he was not convinced that the mill's proposed 250m high chimney would be sufficient to lift smoke particles clear of the inversion layer and that industrial scrubbing processes could not get all of the dangerous particles which were finer than 2.5 microns.

Dr Markos said those PM2.5 particles were not stopped by nose hairs or sneezes, they went straight through the lung walls into the blood stream where, the WHO found, they were a leading cause of cancer.

"When the proposed pulp mill was assessed in 2006-7 ... some believed that these were not likely to be harmful because the background particle pollution from wood smoke was falling and the particle pollution from wood smoke was falling and particle pollution might meet national limit values," Dr Markos said..

He said the WHO findings had called the national limits into question.

"The report confirms that there is no safe threshold for exposure to fine particle pollution and that health benefits will result from any reduction of PM2.5 concentrations whether or not the current levels are above or below the limit values," he said.

"Any new industry creating large volume emissions into the Tamar Valley is likely to add to this pollution."
