

NEWS

Winter smog 'problematic'

BY JESSICA WILLARD

TASMANIA has some of the worst asthma rates in the country and in winter some of the poorest air quality.

As the weather cools down and smoke pollution increases, Asthma Australia is urging Tasmanians to be conscious about the potentially harmful health impacts of wood fires.

A combination of chemicals in gaseous, liquid and solid forms, wood smoke contains different sized par-

ticles that can cause different health effects.

Asthma Australia chief executive Michele Goldman said while wood fires provided a "unique sense of ambience", people were often unaware of the health impacts.

"We understand when we see bushfires outside of our homes that the smoke is harmful, but we don't make the same connections with indoor fires," she said.

"It's especially problematic for people with asthma and other respiratory illness-

es. It can cause symptoms or worse, full blown asthma attacks meaning someone would need to go to hospital."

Tasmania has Australia's highest incidence of asthma, affecting about 13.4 per cent of the population.

Asthma is also one of the primary reasons for hospital admissions in children.

From June 26, new Tasmanian regulations aimed at limiting the amount of smoke produced by heaters and fireplaces in and around urban areas, came into effect.

The regulations will place limitations on smoke emissions from wood fired heating and cooking appliances.

New woodheaters for sale will also be required to conform with the most recent Australian standards for efficiency and emissions.

Ms Goldman said there were huge variants between older, uncleaned fires using wet wood, compared to modern high efficiency systems.

"Smoke from wood fires produces a large amount of

really small particulate matter," she said.

"The fine particles are the ones that are really concerning, in terms of the whole range of health conditions.

"Larger particles get trapped in our nose and our mouths, but fine particles travel into our airways and the rest of our circulatory system.

"So they are harmful for asthma and respiratory diseases, but also cardiovascular disease and cancer."

EPA Tasmania recom-

mends homeowners only burn dry, seasoned firewood; always burn with a flame; don't let the fire smoulder; and leave the air control open for 20 minutes after reloading.

Ms Goldman said if people planned to continue using wood fires, they needed to take a considered approach.

"It's not black and white. People need to be conscious that would smoke can be really harmful to health, particularly for people with asthma," she said.