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Wagga's air pollution tops the state

By Rowan Forster

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Farm burn-offs are being blamed for a steep rise in Wagga's air pollution.

RESIDENTS have been warned to significantly limit outdoor activity after Wagga's air pollution rivalled Beijing's "toxic cloud" in recent weeks.

Wagga has consistently topped the state for "poor" and "hazardous" air quality after breaching the National Environment Protection Measure standards on six days between April 1 and 10.

The figures were only worsened after the town reached an almost off-the-scale air quality pollution rating of 246 last Monday.

Local levels of small particle pollution, which can lodge deep inside the lungs, surpassed Beijing in the first week of April.

Greens member and Wagga councillor Kevin Poynter said the "very, very concerning" figures are likely a direct result of burn-offs.

"Burning off certainly contributes to poor air quality; it'll certainly be a contributor to the problem we're having," Cr Poynter said.

"We need to find other ways of managing burn-offs – we have lots of people trying lots of different things and its time we move on from them."

It comes as the Murrumbidgee Local Health District on Wednesday issued a warning to all respiratory sufferers to stay indoors.

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CSU biomedical lecturer Pip Southwell said that while she cannot pinpoint the cause of the air-pollution, the warnings should be taken seriously.

"These levels are significant in themselves despite being compared to other communities," she said. "What is interesting is figuring out why they are so much higher."

FarmLink Research and CSIRO trials at Temora last week found that grazing and retaining stubble is more profitable than burning off.

The MLHD's Tracey Oakman said the health effects from breathing in the smoke range from eye and respiratory irritation, to serious aggravation of lung conditions.

"Keep houses closed as much as possible when there is heavy smoke around and reduce your outside activity," Mrs Oakman said.

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