

**OFFICERS REPORT****6.1 WOOD HEATERS**

Submitting Councillor: Dr Josh Fergeus

**MOTION**

*That Council:*

- i) Acknowledges Council continues to hear concerns from Monash residents regarding the impact of wood heaters on health, amenity and the environment;*
- ii) Notes the evidence which demonstrates that long term exposure to pollution from wood heaters causes increased risk of heart and respiratory disease, and reduced life expectancy<sup>1</sup>;*
- iii) Notes estimates published in the Medical Journal of Australia of a total cost to the community of \$10,930 per wood heater per year in health and other costs<sup>2</sup>;*
- iv) Notes that wood heaters are responsible for generating more fine particulate matter, generally regarded as the most hazardous air pollutant, than power stations and road vehicles combined<sup>3</sup>;*
- v) Advocates to the State Government and the EPA in support of measures which will reduce the impact of wood heaters on health, the amenity and the environment and informs the Monash community of this work.*

**BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

There are no budget implications.

**IMPACT ON INTERNAL RESOURCES**

There are no internal resource impacts.

**COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICIES**

If adopted a commitment to advocate for measures which will reduce the impact of wood heaters on health, the amenity and the environment can be drawn into the Year 1 and 2 Action Plans of the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025 which is due to be adopted at Council's October 2021 meeting.

**RELEVANCE TO WORK ALREADY UNDERTAKEN BY OFFICERS OR COMMITTEES**

The installation of wood heaters are regulated under the Building Act requirements and new heaters should be certified to Australian Standards AS/NZ 4012:2014 and AS/NZ 4012:2014.

Concerns of smoke emissions from wood heaters affecting a person's health and wellbeing are investigated by Council's Public Health Unit. Environmental Health Officers will investigate

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<sup>1</sup> [Robinson, Horsley, Johnston & Morgan, 2021](#)

<sup>2</sup> Op cit

<sup>3</sup> Chang, Scorgie, Duc et al, 2019

such matters and make a determination as to whether a *nuisance* can be established under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008.

As wood heaters are a legitimate form of heating, Council currently only has the ability to intervene or stop the use of a wood heater where it is satisfied from an investigation that a nuisance exists. Investigations will typically include establishing such facts as:

- The amount of smoke being emitted from the operation of the wood heater;
- Whether the smoke enters neighbouring properties and if so, the levels of such smoke that enter the property;
- The frequency of use of the wood heater; and
- The effect the smoke has on the health or state of ease of the residents of neighbouring properties.

This approach is consistent with that taken across the public health industry in Victoria.

When a wood heater is being operated correctly, it should run cleanly and efficiently and limit any smoke and environmental nuisance. Having said this, it is expected and typical that wood heaters emit smoke even when operated correctly. This will be evident when a wood heater is first started or when fuel is added to a fire. If the heater is being operated correctly there should be no or little visible smoke from 20-25 minutes after first being lit. Therefore, officers will often focus on educating wood heater operators about these matters when responding to a complaint.

Submissions seeking a ban on wood heaters in residential settings were considered when Council made Local Law No.3 – Community Amenity in November 2014. Having considered these, Council decided not to include such a control in the Local Law that was adopted. At this point in time Officers are unaware of controls being introduced by other Councils regarding the use of wood heaters.

### ***FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS***

Smoke emanating from wood heaters is a vexed issue. Whilst some in the community report to be impacted by the adverse impacts of smoke there are others in the community who use wood heaters as a legitimate means of heating.

There are a range of studies around the use of wood heaters including a 2020 CSIRO report that found almost 25% of respondents from a geographically representative survey of Australian households reported using firewood as an energy source in their home. Furthermore, the Australian Home Heating Association refers to another CSIRO report that found wood heating produces less greenhouse emissions than all other domestic heating options.

Whilst there are arguments for and against wood heaters, it remains open for Council to advocate to the State Government and the Environment Protection Agency seeking measures that will help to reduce their impact.