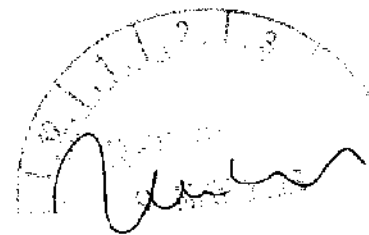


Newsome, Silvana (REPS)

From:
Sent: Friday, 9 May 2003 2:51 PM
To: Committee, Bushfires (REPS)
Subject: Incidence and impact of bushfires



The Committee Secretary
House of Select Committee
Department of the House
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Submission No.215

Dear Sir/Madam,

SUBMISSION ON INQUIRY INTO THE INCIDENCE AND IMPACT OF BUSHFIRES

Firstly, our condolences to all people affected by the devastating Canberra bushfires.

However, since then we have noticed calls in the local media for all bushland to be burned every year to reduce the fuel load. We hope that the Canberra bushfires do not lead to needless and increased burning practices. Should this occur, many people will be subjected to poor air quality on a regular basis. Poor health caused by burning practices seems to be overlooked in many instances.

Although smoke from burning wood and vegetation is often looked upon as being "natural", it is far from being harmless. Breathing air containing wood smoke contributes to cardiovascular problems, lung diseases like asthma, emphysema, pneumonia and bronchitis, irritation of the lungs, throat, sinuses and eyes, headaches and allergic reactions.

The fine particulates of wood smoke can lodge deep in the lungs where they can cause structural damage and chemical changes to lung tissue and reduce resistance to infection - researched information "Health Effects of Wood Smoke" - Washington State Department of Ecology <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/biblio/92046.html>.

As well as human suffering, managing these health problems also puts an enormous financial strain on families and the public health care system.

We acknowledge that back-burning/controlled burning will always play a necessary part in protecting life and property from threatening bushfires, however we also believe that the effect on air quality and human health from regular burning practices must be considered in any strategy that comes from this Inquiry.

We hope that the following recommendations will be considered.

- **MINIMISE BURNING PRACTICES FOR THE BENEFIT OF CLEAN AIR AND HUMAN HEALTH** (many people unknowingly (as well as knowingly) suffer health problems caused by "environmental" smoke or "nuisance" smoke).
- Greater use of machinery and manual labour to create fire breaks and reduce fuel loads (perhaps Work for the Dole could be involved).
- Regular "house-keeping" by people living near bushland areas.
- Better house design and construction near bushland areas.
- Better planning so that housing and other developments are not permitted next to, or amongst fire prone areas.
- Mowing/slashing in plantation areas to reduce fuel load.
- Prohibiting the lighting of fires in camping areas - most campers have gas stoves for cooking purposes.
- Consultation undertaken so that all parties considering burning are made aware of the effect on air quality, the impact on human health and the significant cost to families and the health care system, to understand why **MINIMAL BURNING** and **ALTERNATIVE METHODS** for fuel reduction are required.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this complex issue.

Yours faithfully

CABRA

(raising Community Awareness of the health effects of Burning wood in Residential Areas)