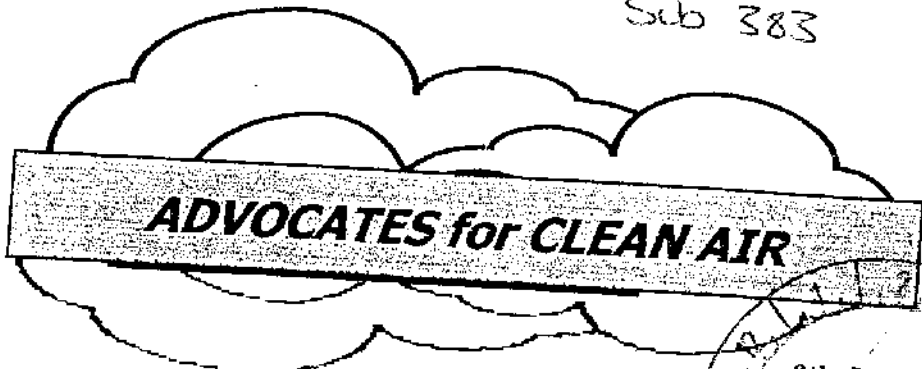
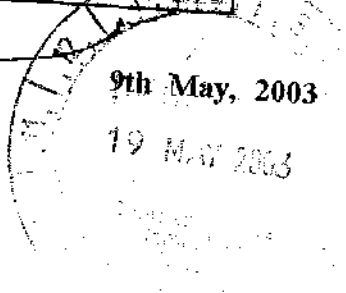


Sub 383



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Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia  
Select Committee on the Recent Australian Bushfires  
Department of the House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Attention: The Committee Secretary

Dear Sir / or Madam,

Re: "Inquiry into the INCIDENCE and IMPACT of BUSHFIRES"

We refer to the 'Impact of Bushfires', and wish to make known our grave concerns regarding the ADVERSE HEALTH EFFECTS and increased MORTALITY risks associated with the fine particle pollution contained in wood smoke, known as PM2.5 (particulate matter which measures 2.5 micrometres, or less in diameter).

*References to studies regarding the extreme health threats from PM2.5 are included here in the enclosed literature. Most notable being:-*

- The 'National Environment Protection Council' (NEPC), Adelaide;*
- 'Washington State Department of Ecology', U.S.;*
- 'UNE Air Quality Research Group' (University of New England), Armidale;*
- The 'American Lung Association'; and,*
- 'NSW EPA'*

Although we accept bushfires in Australia will always occur, and understand the fear of devastation from fire prompts many in the community to seek HAZARD REDUCTIONS, the current approach to bush and land management practices (in Queensland, at least), appears to involve the use of 'FIRE' at the exclusion of NON-POLLUTING methods.

**SMOKE IS NO JOKE !**

**AT RISK** of suffering Serious Adverse Health Effects, and increased Mortality threats, are:- Newborns, young Children, the Elderly, and those with pre-existing conditions like Cancer, Emphysema, Asthma, Bronchitis, Heart diseases, Auto-immune dysfunctions, and Allergic reactions.

The broader community are also at risk of long-term health threats, similar to that of PASSIVE SMOKING, as wood smoke contains many of the exact

same Irritants, Toxicants, and Carcinogens as cigarette smoke.

A chart comparing both wood and tobacco smoke emissions is enclosed, plus an EPA report by 'Larson and Koenig' lists additional health harming substances identified in wood smoke alone.

One U.S. EPA study (Lewtas et al., 1991), found the lifetime Cancer risk from wood smoke may be 12 times greater than the cancer risk from equal concentrations of cigarette smoke (see W.S.D.of Ecology, and UNE, Armidale).

It seems incongruous of Governments to have passed legislation banning cigarette smoking in work places, public dining areas, and even outside the front of buildings (situations where AVOIDANCE can be exercised at will, through CHOICE), and yet allow huge quantities of smoke pollution from deliberately lit, and often less than necessary, so-called hazard reduction fires, to foul entire atmospheres in greater proportions than cigarette smoke ever would.

NO CHOICE can be exercised by vulnerable people (who are within the privacy of their own homes), to AVOID the all pervading PM2.5 smoke pollution, which is not stopped by closed doors and windows. They have no choice in avoiding the increased mortality risks, the extreme respiratory discomfort, and a variety of other distressing and irritating symptoms such as those listed here separately.

The ABS "National Health Survey" of 1995 and 2001 revealed approximately one third of Australians had some kind of respiratory complaint. (copy encl.)

The Asthma Foundation reports:- "1 in 4 Children (25%) will experience asthma symptoms.....Each survey in the last 15 years has shown an increase in asthma prevalence". (copy encl.) Due to the high incidence, the Federal Health Minister, Kay Patterson has just allocated \$1.3 million toward educating and caring for Children with asthma in schools (massive funds for symptoms, but NO funds for reducing one of the major CAUSES).

The SIDS Foundation recommends:- "always keep your baby in a smoke-free environment". (copy encl.)

The Heart Foundation says:- the incidence of Heart disease is getting worse, not better.....3.2 million Australians are affected.....it claims a life every 10 minutes.....50,000 die each year.....and,... 30% die prematurely. Dr. Paul Harris, RPA Hospital, says:- "You could probably decrease the incidence of heart disease and cardiovascular events by more than 50% if you could correct the risk factors in the community". Since smoking is acknowledged as a major risk factor in the cause of heart disease, so must environmental wood smoke be recognised as a major factor.

We consider toxic smoke from naturally occurring wild fires is more than sufficient for vulnerable people (who have chosen to exclude themselves from social smoke), to be forced to cope with, without also having to endure

**pollution from deliberately lit, frequent 'hazard-reduction' fires.**

**They are a hazard REDUCTION for whom?**

**Certainly NOT for the approximate six million or more Australians who will experience Asthma, other respiratory complaints, headaches, sinusitis, joint pain, allergic rhinitis/ hayfever, and many more debilitating and irritating adverse effects from the INCREASE in hazards to health.**

**In some areas like mine, though 'hazard reduction burning' occurs all year round, it markedly increases during winter, a time of year when dense air and inversion layers hold toxic smoke pollution down near ground level, creating frequent blanketing, and lingering haze. The ultra fine particles in 'smoke haze' can be responsible for many more ailments than either patient, or health workers recognise as having been initiated by fine particle (PM2.5) pollution. NO consideration appears to be forthcoming from Government agencies regarding the health effects caused by such concentrations for prolonged periods.**

**It seems burning has become an unthinking habit. In many instances, environmentally friendly ALTERNATIVES could be used, such as:- mechanical and manual clearing, together with (employment creating) practices like:- milling, chipping, mulching, carting to land-fill sites, and even selling to 'Green Power Stations' where waste vegetation is used constructively, and incinerated under controlled conditions with scrubbers and filters for the protection of human health and the Environment's Ozone layer.**

**We believe BURNING to reduce hazards should be 'The Choice of Last Resort', and be initiated only in emergency situations when wildfires occur.**

**The 'Cost Effectiveness' arguement is always used to validate BURNING habits. However, those who make the decision to burn, believe it's not their responsibility to consider human health, nor give any thought to the passed-on costs being borne by an already overburdened medical, hospital, and pharmaceutical system, who treat the results of UNNECESSARY air-fouling.**

**It is for this reason we believe strong Commonwealth Legislation is required to protect Human Health, above all else.**

**We regard it UNCONSCIONABLE of Government agencies like, The Fire Service, Forrestry, Local Councils, and The EPA, (who are charged with the responsibility of protecting the environment, and human health), to blatantly and knowingly allow highly toxic, and potentially carcinogenic substances to be released into the atmosphere. All air-borne pollutants must eventually fall to earth, affecting rain water, soil, and vegetation, which ultimately contaminates our food chain.**

**Australians need not worry about chemical and biological warefare coming from**

off-shore, we're slowly, but surely, doing a good job of poisoning ourselves.

Protection for life and property, against fire hazards, could be achieved WITHOUT BURNING, if the cutting of 'fire breaks', and reasonable ongoing maintenance of vegetation clearing, plus mulching, and trickle irrigation (where possible), were made a PRIORITY. People who CHOOSE to live within bushland settings should be accountable for shouldering much of the responsibility for 'risk management'. Enforcement of 'risk management' requirements could be administered by Rural Fire Service Officers.

We consider the lighting of a fire, to prevent a fire (that may NOT have occurred otherwise), is an unintelligent approach to 'hazard reduction', especially in view of the significant number of so-called 'controll burn' activities that have in the past, gone disasterously wrong, and been responsible for many devistating consequences such as total annihilation of forrests, loss of human life, and destruction of private property. In addition, the resulting smoke pollution has created far reaching consequences for human health, with an estimated 58% or more, being adversely affected (to a greater or lesser degree).


We believe Government agencies should be ensuring, wherever possible, that NON-POLLUTING methods are used to reduce hazards, utilizing schemes such as, "work for the dole" to carry out the increased volume of manual clearing required.

The necessity for the invention and development of suitable special equipment to reach ordinarily inaccessible terrain may also be likely, which would provide employment in engineering, and manufacturing fields.

The increased costs involved in the use of ENVIRONMENTALLY - FRIENDLY methods may be greater in the short term, but we believe, would be far outweighed by the long-term, broad economic, and health gains, providing cleaner air, better health, increased productivity, and fuller employment.

Thank you for the invitation to comment on the "Incidence and Iimpact of Bushfires", and we trust our perspective will make a difference.

Yours faithfully,



Gayle Crossett, (AFCA)  
On behalf of those too sick  
to raise a voice.