

**INQUIRY INTO HEALTH IMPACTS OF EXPOSURE TO
POOR LEVELS OF AIR QUALITY RESULTING FROM
BUSHFIRES AND DROUGHT**

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Submission by
Michelle Lowry - Retired

My diagnosis- Bronchiectasis is a chronic lung disease, defined pathologically as irreversible dilatation of the bronchi; personally, I implement preventive measures to stay well.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Inquiry into the health impacts of exposure to poor levels of air quality resulting from bushfires and drought

TERMS OF REFERENCE

That Portfolio Committee No. 2 – Health inquire into and report on:

1 The health impacts of exposure to poor levels of air quality resulting from bushfires and drought including:

(a) the impact of at-risk groups including children, pregnant women, people with asthma and other respiratory-related illnesses, the elderly and other high risk groups as well as vulnerable companion animals;

Personal impact

1. Exacerbation of Bronchiectasis causing infection
2. Feelings of anxiety due to being unable to leave home to source fresh air as the poor air quality was everywhere - there was nowhere to go
3. Feelings of depression due to being isolated at home during this time
4. Unable to leave my home to attend Doctors, Physiotherapy or shop for food

(b) the impact on people who are exposed to poor outdoor air quality in the workplace;

Not applicable to me personally

(c) the long term impacts of exposure; and

Personally, I am scared for the future as long term impacts are unknown

(d) the effectiveness of various protective materials and strategies to mitigate the health impacts of exposure.

I have my own supply of procedure face masks that I use when attending hospitals, doctors offices and travelling on public transport.

With the bushfire smoke and dust storms these masks were ineffective so I purchased P2 masks. What I found was that some of the P2 masks were so toxic that I could not wear them. The toxic fumes coming from the mask was overwhelming.

Happy to provide samples if required.

I would like to see P2 Type masks that are medical grade (non toxic) and also smaller masks for children developed for at-risk groups

2. The effectiveness of the NSW Government to plan for and improve air quality including:

(a) the measurement, reporting and public awareness;

The reporting of air quality could be improved, most reports are aimed at big cities and people in rural areas are forgotten.

Personally, I rely on an app called Breezometer which usually works well but during the height of the bush fires it didn't cope, understandable considering the unique circumstances.

I would like to air quality included on the BOM app or if that's not possible then an Australian version of BreezoMeter or similar

(b) the provision of various protective materials including face masks and air purifiers;

The provision of masks by the government was announced far too late. I searched the internet to find where I could source the masks and could not find a list of suppliers.

Next time a list of suppliers would be very helpful.

Luckily I have my own supply but others who could not go out to get one, missed out. Prior to the next Fire season the government could provide suitable masks for adults and children with lung conditions via doctors offices.

With regards to air purifiers I did purchase my own late in the fire season, and it did make a difference to the air quality inside my home.

It would be good if government could see it way clear to provide air purifiers or at least a subsidy to people with lung disease

(c) the ability to ensure the health of at-risk groups;

here's a few ideas

Report actual air quality daily and on bad days update the report as it changes

Use all media to report air quality. TV, Radio, Social Media, BOM APPS, Newspapers, SMS to mobiles

Send recorded messages to home phones for the elderly who don't have access to other media

Where fuel reduction is planned report the estimated air quality so people can make an informed choice as whether to leave the area or not.

Provide masks to at-risk groups prior to the fire season

Provide subsidies for air purifiers

(d) the suitability of work health and safety regulations, industrial provisions and related guidelines; and

Not applicable to me personally

(e) the capacity to respond within existing resources and ongoing efficiency dividends.

Not applicable to me personally

3. Any related matters.

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Thank you for accepting my submission

Kind regards

Michelle Lowry