C/. !9 CAROL YN ST
DOUNDOWRAN
HERVEY BA Y Q 4655
PH (07) 4128 7293.

ADVOCATES for CLEAN AIR

5th December, 2003

Council of Australian Governments Bushfire Inquiry
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
3-5 National Circuit
BARTON ACT 2600

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"INQUIRY ON BUSHFIRE MITIGATION AND MANAGE ENT"

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Attention: Mr. Ellis, Professor Kanowski, and Professor Whelan

Dear Sirs,

Re: Adverse HEALTH effects caused by Bushfire SMOKE

We refer to the above, and wish to express our grave concerns regarding the current approach to bushfre mitigation practices. Management appears to involve the use of prescribed burning at the exclusion of non-polluting methods like the physical creation of fire break corridors and manual clearing of excess fuel loads.

We consider the deliberate burning of bushland should be the 'choice of last resort', initiated in emergency situations only, to control wild fires already in progress. Given the history of past events where significant numbers of so called "controlled bums" have gotten disasterously out of control and been responsible for complete annihilation of forrests, loss of human life, and destruction of private-property, we believe the lighting of a fire to prevent a fire (that may not have occurred otherwise) is an unintelligent approach to mitigation.

The resulting smoke also causes far reaching atmospheric contamination by air toxics like carbon monoxide, oxides of nitrogen and fine particulate matter (PM2.5), which seriously affects the health of susceptible people, many suffering inordinate pain and distress on a daily basis.

Often, temperature inversions act as a "lid" and hold down the noxious gases and toxic substances near ground level where people live, work, and sleep. The ultra fine particles in lingering 'smoke haze' can be responsible for many more ailments than either patients or health workers recognise as having been initiated by smoke pollution. These particles are small enough to evade the body's defences, penetrating deep into the tiny air sacs where oxygen enters the bloodstream (see web site - U.S. *Washington State Department* of Ecology below).

SMOKE IS NO JOKE! An approximated 40-60% of any given community are at risk of being adversely affected to a greater or lesser degree. Research studies have shown more premature deaths are attributed to wood smoke toxicity than is currently acknowledged by Authorities (references are contained in a number of web sites below).

MOST AT RISK are:- Newborns, young Children, the Elderly, and the Immuno-compromised with pre-existing conditions such as: Asthma, Emphysema, Bronchitis, Cystic Fibrosis, Heart disease, Cancer, Auto-immune dysfunctions like Lupus and M.S., Chronic Sinusitis, Allergic Rhititis, and MCS (Multiple Chemical Sensitivity) as well as other respiratory conditions, *7·he ABS National Health* Surveys of both 1995 and 2001 revealing more than one third of Australians had some kind of respiratory complaint.

Since wood smoke contains many of the exact same Irritants, Toxicants, and Carcinogens as Cigarette Smoke, the broader healthy community are also at risk of long term health threats similar to PASSIVE SMOKING. A Chart comparing the substances in both Wood and tobacco smoke is enclosed, plus an *EPA Report (Larson and Koenig)* lists additional health harming substances in wood smoke alone. One U.S. *EPA Study (Leu,tas et al.,* 1991) found *"the lifetime Cancer risk fi-om wood smoke may be as much as 12 times greater than the cancer risk from equal concentrations of cigarette smoke" (ref. Washington State Dept.* of *Ecology, and Armidale's Air Quality Research Group's* web sites).

It seems incongruous that Governments have passed legislation banning cigarette smoke in work places, public dining areas, and on occasions within 10 metres of building frontages, while at the same time allow hugh quantities of environmental smoke from unnecessary burning activities to contaminate densely populated residential areas in greater proportions than cigarette smoke ever would.

Work areas and public places can be avoided by CHOICE, however NO

CHOICE of avoidance can be exercised by vulnerable people whilst within their own homes. Environmental smoke can be all pervading and is not stopped by closed doors and windows. There is no chance of escaping the respiratory distress, or any number of irritating and debilitating symptoms such as: severe headaches, burning eyes, nose and throat, sinus pain, joint pain, post nasal drip, chest pain, insomnia, nausea, loss of appetite, cognitive dysfunction, lethargy, and many other adverse effects listed here separately.

We consider smoke from naturally occurring wild fires is more than sufficient for vulnerable people to be forced to cope with, without also having to endure frequent air-fouling from deliberately lit fires, created in the name of "Hazard Reductions".

They are a ***hazard reduction*** for whom? Certainly NOT for those approximate six million or more Australians who will be adversely affected by the ***increased hazard to their Health.***

Cost Effectiveness is always used as an arguement to validate BURNING habits. However, NO thought is given, to the passed-on costs having to be borne by an already overburdened Hospital, Medical, and Pharmaceutical system, forced to treat the consequences of unnecessary air-fouling.

We regard it UNCONSCIONABLE of Governement agencies to blatantly and knowingly release highly toxic, and potentially carcinogenic substances into the atmosphere. All airborne pollutants must eventually fall to earth, affecting rain water and soil, which ultimately contaminates our food chain as well.

It seems to those of us who experience the inescapable regular invasion of our personal spaces, that Authorities entrusted with the responsibility of community well-being, are NOT prioritising human health requirements. We need not worry about chemical and biological warefare coming from offshore, we're-slowly but surely doing a good job of poisoning ourselves.

People should expect to be entitled to breathe clean air whilst within their own homes. We believe Governments should be protecting the Environment and Human Health above all else, ensuring wherever possible that NON-POLLUTING practices are the primary methods of mitigation employed. Work for the Dole', and other Community Service schemes may be utilized to provide the extra manual labour required to ensure a clean environment.

Protection of life and property against bushfire threats could be achieved WITHOUT BURNING if reasonable ongoing physical maintenance of buffer zones around housing and roadways was treated as a PRIORITY. We're told mechanical and manual clearing was 'Best Practice' some 30 or so years ago, and provided year round work for many. The use of this practice would also provide employment in other areas like Saw Milling, Wood Chip and Mulch industries, land fill businesses, as well as being constructively used in 'Green Power Stations' where waste vegetation is burned under controlled conditions with scrubbers and filters to protect the Environment.

People who CHOOSE to live within vegetated areas should become accountable for shouldering a great deal of the responsiblity of 'risk management', and preparedness for wild fire events. Enforcement of risk management requirements involving mechanical and manual fuel load reductions, plus the installation of trickle irrigation with bore water (where possible), could be administered by the Rural Fire Service.

It is invisaged that invention and development of special equipment to slash and vacuum &/or irrigate ordinarily inaccessable terrain, would also create employment in Engineering and manufacturing fields.

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

Substantiating Scientific references regarding adverse health effects and mortality risks can be found at web sites hereunder:

U.S. Washington State Department of Ecology:
http://www ecy. wa.govlprogram lairlwdsntok.pd,f
NSW EPA: *http://www. epa nsw gov aulwoodsmokelproblem htm*
NEPC (National Environment Protection Council) (PM2. S Variation):
http://www ephc.gov aulnepnulairlair variation_A html
JVEPC (National Environment Protection Council)(Air Toxics):
http://www ephc.gov aulnepnulairlairTxics html
Amidale's Air Quality Group: *http://www ozemaiL com aulairqual*
Burning Issues: *http:llwww burning issues. org*
American Lunz Association:
http://www lungiisa. orglairlout00 woodburning html#solutions
and, http://www city.palo-alto.ca uslcleanbaylpdflwoodsmokebilLpdf

ReNew Magazine. *http:llwww ata org. au*
European Commission DC Environment - (cost of PiV2. 5 emission)
http:lleuropa eu. intlcomrrrlenvironment/envecolairlhetaec02aforprinti ng pdf
U.K Department of Environment:
http://www defragov uk. environmentlairquality/airpolllnde-chtm).

Although our focus has been on heal it has come to our attention that rainfall is also affected by pollution from bushfires. Enclosed is a copy of a News Release' by NASA', which is headed:- "NASA *Spacecraft Provides Direct Evidence - Smoke Inhihits Rainfall" (part* of a submission by "Australian Management Consolidated Pty. Ltd.", on Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forrestry, *concerning future water supplies* for Australia's rural industries and communities).

We thank you *for* the invitation to comment on 'Bushfire Mitigation and Management', and hope our perspectives will make a difference.

Yours faithfully,

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Gayle Crossett (AFCA)
(?n behalf of those too sick
to raise a voice.

suffering
allergies / chemical illness/injury
sensitivity
1a St. KALLANGUR.
4503

A quote from the American Lung Association:
" When You Can't Breathe, Nothing Else Matters"