

Wood heater education, not elimination, is the key, says AHHA

Winter air quality is of concern to us all, but replacing wood heaters is not the answer, education is, says the Australian Home Heating Association (AHHA).

To be fair to all and to ensure continued consumer right to choose the best home heating solution, AHHA General Manager Demi Brown says we need to look at all factors affecting community air quality, and the pros and cons of all home heating options, including the total pollution effect.

“During the year a number of factors can affect the air we breathe such as bush fires, burning of winter crop stubbles, summer storms, motor vehicle use and the topography of the land around us.

“There is no dispute that old, poorly operated wood heaters can also contribute to pollution, however, it must be noted that so do all heating appliances. There is no such thing as a pollution-free heater.”

The AHHA believes arguments for renewable resourcing and reducing greenhouse gas emissions have fallen in the shadow of particulate arguments in the wood heating debate, and its view for the future is to educate not eliminate.

“The use of fossil fuels such as gas and coal for the production of electricity has wider global effects affecting everyone,” Ms Brown said. “By using these fossil fuels you simply shift your pollution to someone else’s backyard.”

In response to negative publicity Ms Brown said the key to reducing woodsmoke was education about the correct operation of wood heaters and the responsible change over from older style wood heaters and open brick fire places to new AS/NZS 4013 certified units.

Education

“Education on the correct usage of wood heaters is vital to minimising woodsmoke, including the use of dry, seasoned wood and purchasing wood from a reputable supplier,” Ms Brown said.

“The AHHA supports the removal of older style wood heaters and open brick fire places to reduce woodsmoke and supports education on how to operate wood heaters properly and upgrades to certified clean burn wood heaters.”

The AHHA has produced a video on the correct operation of wood heaters to facilitate this and maintains that modern wood heaters produce up to 80% less smoke and

particle pollution than earlier models, due to substantial technological advances over the past ten years.

Australia has some of the toughest wood heater standards in the world and there are approximately 250 environmentally friendly wood heaters on the market with AS/NZS 4013 certification.

“AS/NZS 4013 certified clean burn wood heaters reduce woodsmoke by up to 80% in some cases, giving benefits to both consumers and the environment,” she said.

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“Not only is wood heating one of the most efficient forms of home heating, it is also one of the cheapest ways to heat your home, and this must be considered for lower income families and the elderly.”

Tips on how to operate wood heaters correctly and how to minimise woodsmoke, can be found on the AHHA’s website www.homeheat.com.au.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Increased use of gas and electric heating alternatives contributes to global warming with higher greenhouse gas emissions.

“Electricity is commonly produced by burning coal, which contributes to one of our largest environmental disasters – global warming.

“Wood heaters on the other hand are one of lowest producers of greenhouse emissions and have the added benefit of renewable resourcing, which is a better long term view for everybody,” Ms Brown said.

“AS/NZS 4013 wood heaters are the environmentally friendly option for consumers who love a roaring wood fire and are in support of renewable resourcing. Coal takes millions of years to form and gas resources will eventually be depleted, however you can keep on growing trees forever,” she said.

Demand for Clean Burn Wood heaters

Exclusion of certified clean burn wood heaters in some buyback schemes could be slowing down improvements in woodsmoke levels believes the Association.

According to ACNielsen research commissioned by the AHHA in 2002, in two areas with buyback schemes operating, 83% of the respondents felt buyback rebates should also apply to upgrade to certified clean burn wood heaters.

Ms Brown said if individual scheme’s upgrade options included certified clean burn wood heaters along with an education program, consumers who preferred wood heating could upgrade their old wood heaters for certified ones – meeting the needs of both consumers and environment bodies much sooner.

“Not everyone wants to trade their old style wood heater in for a gas or electric option. If AS/NZS 4013 wood heaters were also included in buyback programs, I believe we’d see

more and more older style wood heaters out of action – which is what the AHHA, and air quality programs all want.”

In total, over 75% of those who used wood heating in the ACNielsen survey, said their heating costs would rise if wood heaters were no longer permitted.

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For AHHA information tips on how to operate your wood heater correctly, please refer to: www.homeheat.com.au/correct.html

The AHHA has produced a 10-minute ‘Clear Skies’ education video available to the public for just \$4.50 (Including postage and handling). Phone: (08) 8231 4633.