

Wood heater health concern aired

By Naomi Fallon

A CONCERNED resident is calling on the council to reduce the amount of pollution from wood smoke in the Queanbeyan area.

Long considered an issue in Canberra, Mark Kristofferson said wood smoke pollution was also a serious problem in neighbouring Queanbeyan.

"I get it in the house, it comes through the bathroom vents and I wake up with smoke in my mouth some mornings," he said.

"Wood smoke is actually much like cigarette smoke, it's got toxins in it like benzene which can cause diseases such as cancer.

"They say there's no safe level but the hazard increases with long-term exposure and the proximity to it."

Mr Kristofferson said there was evidence of at least four wood heaters operating within a couple of blocks of his home.

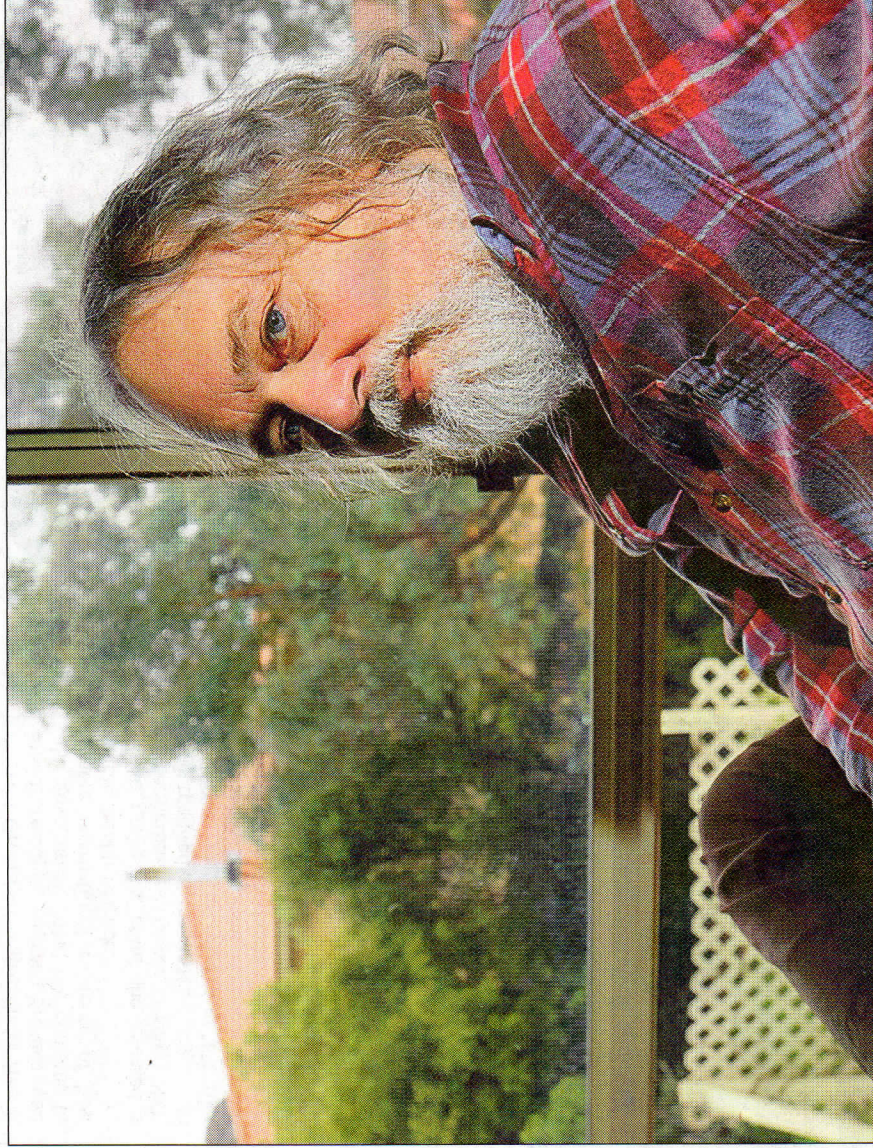
"And this is a new area, so they're obviously still putting them in - it's getting pretty common," he said.

Not alone in his concern, Mr Kristofferson said his neighbours also complained about the smoke.

"Most people don't complain, they just put up with it," he said.

"I actually wrote to the mayor just before last winter but I never got a reply."

Although he doesn't expect an immediate ban on wood heaters, the former economist said there were "administratively simple" programs the council could put in place.



Mark Kristofferson has reported wood smoke problems in Queanbeyan.

"They could implement a 50/50 system like they do with water," he said. "That would have a dramatic

impact I think. It would cut pollution by 50 per cent overnight. It would also dissuade people from putting in

new heaters or relying on wood heaters as a sole heating source."

In the long term Mr Kristofferson

said people needed to stop installing wood heaters.

"If you could control people putting in new heaters then you could offer a subsidy if you pull them out and it would make sense," he said.

The Queanbeyan City Council manager of environment and health, Natasha Abbott, said the council had been involved in smoke reducing campaigns in the past.

"In 2004 council received funding from the NSW Government to be part of a regional advertising campaign to reduce smoke from wood heaters," she said.

From 2006 to 2008 with the help of government and ActewAGL funding, the council offered rebates for the removal of wood heaters.

"In total 84 wood heaters have been removed from the Queanbeyan area with the wood heater programs between 2004 and 2008," Ms Abbott said.

Due to a lack of funding, Ms Abbott said the council had not undertaken any similar projects for the past two years.

"Council has a commitment towards sustainability and may look at sustainable energy options being promoted, depending on future funding availability," she said.

"Certainly I think council would consider involvement in schemes to reduce particulates and promote the use of renewable energy. [The] government seem to have initiated programs towards this direction and council at this stage can only direct people towards existing programs."

Picture: Elesa Lee