

Call to phase out wood burning

By Peter Reynolds

THE Tuggeranong Community Council (TCC) has reaffirmed its aim of having wood smoke in the Tuggeranong Valley eliminated within the next six years.

In its submission into the ACT Government's review of existing wood smoke reduction programs, the TCC has stated it supports an enhanced wood smoke education program and is willing to work with the ACT Government in reducing and eventually eliminating wood smoke pollution in the Tuggeranong Valley by 2016.

TCC president Darryl Johnston said the people of Tuggeranong had suffered the effects of wood smoke for too long and it was time to act on the issue.

"This is a serious environmental issue and a serious health issue," he said.

"Cities and towns all over the world have recognised this and taken decisive steps to substantially reduce or phase out wood burning, however, we in Canberra seem to be pretty slow to react.

"We believe that any education program that the government runs should highlight the impact that wood smoke can have on people's health.

"A significant number of people in the Tuggeranong Valley have heart and lung problems and the wood smoke severely affects them; we have people hibernating in their homes on doctor's orders because if they go outside they will end up in hospital.

"Eventually we need to have burning wood phased out of Tuggeranong.

"We are a special case; both with our topography and the inversion problem we have every winter."

Mr Johnston said figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed that while only four per cent of people in Canberra burnt wood for heating, the smoke contributed to over two-thirds of the air pollution.

"If there were 100 people in a restaurant and only four of them were smoking and causing discomfort for everyone else, surely the majority would rule and the four would be forced to stop," he said.

Some of the suggestions put forward by the TCC to improve the government's wood smoke programs include focusing on the health and environmental impact of wood smoke; demonstrating the established link between the impact of wood smoke and cigarette smoke in all promotions; instill a sense of responsibility in wood heater owners to do the right thing by their neighbours and the environment; and adopt and use slogans similar to those used in anti tobacco advertising.

The ACT Government will release its findings on the effectiveness of its wood smoke programs and its suggestions for improvement in the first sitting week in September.