

Warm houses, clean air, low heating bills

Nobody wants a cold house. Neither does anyone want health damage from wood-heater pollution that's linked to up to 63 premature deaths per year in the ACT (Medical Journal of Australia, January 2024).

We can have the best of both worlds. The Warm up New Zealand project measured electricity consumption after 1973 wood-heaters were replaced with upgraded insulation, if needed, and efficient heat pumps (the NZ name for reverse cycle air-conditioning).

Electricity use increased by just one per cent – less than the cost of petrol to cut and transport firewood, let alone buy it!

Modern, efficient heat pumps deliver over four times as much heat to the home as they use in electric power, averaged over Canberra's cold winters.

NZ researchers hypothesised that new, highly efficient heating reduced the need for expensive radiant heaters in other parts of the house, and for short periods when it wasn't worth lighting the fire.

Participants had warmer homes, lower heating bills and better health from breathing less pollution inside and outside their homes.

Under normal household operation, wood-heaters satisfying the current Australian standard were found to be almost as polluting as the ones in use 20 years ago.

The ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment provided extensive evidence that wood-heater pollution damages our health.

With new heaters almost as polluting as those in use 20 years ago, it's time to heed the commissioner's recommendations and phase them out, in favour of new clean, efficient heating, that the NZ study showed is much cheaper and healthier than burning wood.

Dr Dorothy L Robinson, Australian Air Quality Group