

Local Air Pollution

The Protection of Environmental Operations Act 1997 (PEEO Act), defines air pollution as “*the emission into the air of any air impurity*”. But what does this mean? To smell something our nose and brain work together to make sense of hundreds of very tiny invisible particles, known as molecules or chemicals floating in the air. Council’s role is to investigate and regulate those impurities that are potentially causing harm or a nuisance.

Health effects of air pollution

Smog-forming ozone pollution can cause breathlessness, respiratory difficulties, chest pain, irritation of the airways, and congestion.

Particulate pollution can pass through the throat and nose and enter the lungs, where the particles can cause respiratory and circulation problems, particularly in older adults, children, and people with existing health conditions.

If you’re concerned about air pollution in your area or Sydney in general, the NSW EPA has monitoring stations, with Air Quality Index data provided at 4pm daily. You can also subscribe to [Alerts](#) to help you decide if you should venture outdoors.

What are the main causes of air pollution in our local area?

Bushfires

Bushfires release pollutants into the air from burning vegetation. They can produce fine smoke particles, which are small enough to be able to get into the lungs and potentially damage them and the heart. Bushfires affecting our local air quality earlier this year occurred outside the Council area, demonstrating how wide the impact of bushfire smoke can spread.



Transportation Emissions

Common forms of transportation like cars, trucks, planes and ships generally use combustion to harness energy from fossil fuels. The combustion process releases pollutants into the air, such as particles and carbon monoxide. It also releases substances that quickly form into nitrogen oxides and ozone, which are harmful air pollutants. Cars built after 2013 produce 97% less oxides of nitrogen than vehicles built in 1976.



Wood smoke

All slow combustion wood heaters tend to smoke at light-up or refuelling. However, there is no reason for wood heaters to smoke excessively for long periods of time if they are operated correctly and are well maintained. For information on the causes and solutions for excessive wood smoke, visit the NSW [EPA website](#).



Often wood is also used as fuel in barbecues, wood-fired pizza ovens and fire pits (recreational purposes only), which are allowed in NSW subject to compliance with fire restrictions. When carrying out these activities, it is important that users are:

- (a) taking into account the potential for smoke impacting on any person having regard to:
 - (i) wind direction, and
 - (ii) weather conditions, and
 - (iii) the length of time that the material being burnt is likely to burn,
- (b) taking reasonable measures to ensure that the material being burnt is dry and seasoned,
- (c) burning only suitable wood having regard to possible effects on human health and the environment.

Backyard burning, and unauthorised incineration are prohibited at all times in all council areas in the Sydney, Wollongong and Newcastle regions.

Odour

Odour is a mixture of gases in the air that we can smell. Odours can include pleasant scents and unpleasant smells. Human activities, like landfills and industry, cause most odours. Typical examples of commercial ventures that can produce odour include food shops such as coffee shops/roasters, bakeries, chicken shops (deep fried or charcoal) and fish shops.

Spray Painting

Spray painting vehicles as a hobby, or to repair damaged paint work can have significant implications for both local and regional air quality. Overspray and sanding dust can cause local soiling and fallout problems. Most paint overspray will dry in the air before reaching the complainant so 'wet' paint fallout is rarely a problem. Many solvents and thinners are odorous and can be detected at very low concentrations. Some solvents and thinners are also toxic. All spray painting must be undertaken in a booth that meets with Australian Standards.

What can Council do about air pollution?

If you feel you are being subjected to air pollution created by your neighbouring property, bring the problem to their attention and they may fix the issue quickly. If this does not resolve the problem contact Council or the appropriate authority. There are a number of enforcement options to assist Council with managing local air pollution problems. These include Smoke Abatement Notices, Prevention Notices and Penalty Notices.

The [EPA website](#) provides a list of Government Authorities who are responsible for the air pollution you may be experiencing. Contact the appropriate authorities to assist with your enquiries.

More information

For further information regarding local air pollution, please contact Council's Environmental Health Officer or Customer Service Team.

Note: Please refer to Council's factsheet on Cooking Odours for information on domestic cooking odour issues.

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