

Nevin's Wood smoke Warning

by PETER BARRETT

AN ARMIDALE doctor has some frank advice for patients with respiratory problems: 'move out of town'.

Dr John Nevin says Armidale's long-running and controversial woodsmoke problem is not only exacerbating people's breathing ailments but triggering them.

If Dr Nevin had his way, he would ban all wood heaters on health grounds.

Although he retired from medical practice two years ago, he is still aware of the impact of woodsmoke.

"As John Nevin the citizen I see it – people getting flare-up through winter ... the pall of smoke in the inversion layer that hangs around for six months of the year," he said.

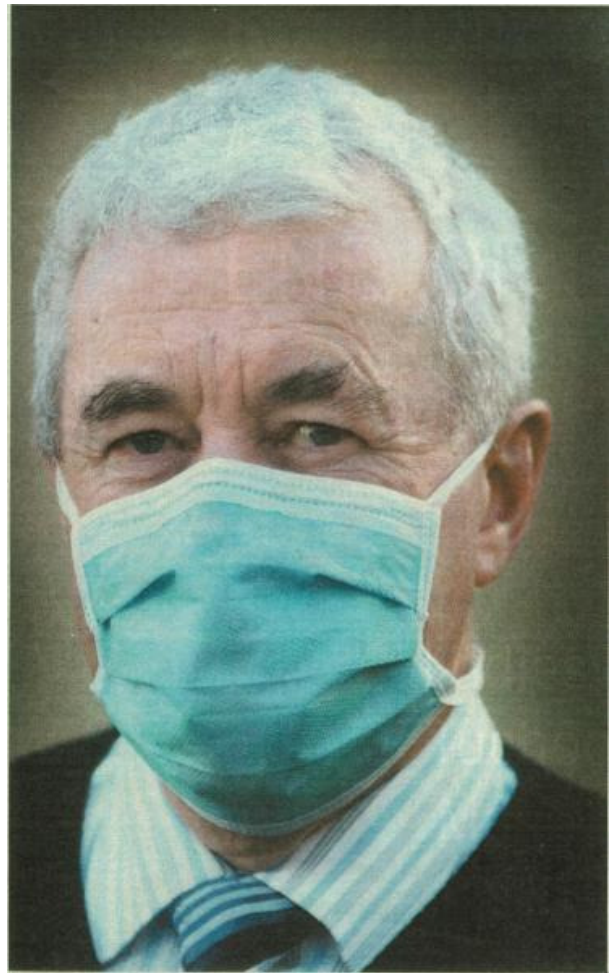
"If I have patients with respiratory problems who are living in town, I advise them to move out of town.

"It's not in their best interests to be exposed to the dangerous levels of woodsmoke about."

More than 30 years ago, Dr Nevin heeded his own advice: he moved out of town.

"Although I don't have lung trouble, I don't want to be exposed to the risk of lung cancer, chronic bronchitis and emphysema", he said.

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Council resolves to fix the problem.

ARMIDALE Dumaresq Council has included \$30,000 in the 2008/09 budget as it continues to try and counter the city's woodsmoke problem.

The \$30,000 will go towards grants and subsidies aimed at domestic energy improvements.

Cr Jim Maher pointed out that the woodsmoke problem was not improving.

Readings from a special aerosol monitor exceeded the acceptable level on 14 of 16 days.

"Armidale residents are being exposed to woodsmoke levels known to be harmful," he said.

"The continuation of woodsmoke air pollution is an important public health issue." MORE, Page 3.

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Medico calls for ban on woodheaters

Dr Nevin said the World Health Organisation's safe levels of woodsmoke are regularly exceeded in winter in Armidale.

"If you have chronic lung trouble it's an unhealthy environment to suggest people try and live in," he said.

"They are the people I particularly see and if they're having recurrent problems through winter and if they are living in the hollows of Armidale, it's likely to be a significant factor in their flare-ups.

"I advise them, in the interests of their own health, they should consider either moving to the heights, out of the pall of woodsmoke, or out of town.

"If it was me, I wouldn't live in central Armidale."

Dr Nevin said wood-burning heaters needed to be banned and replaced by either gas heaters or air conditioning heaters that are less polluting.

He believes that the measures adopted by councils including Armidale Dumaresq to reduce woodsmoke had 'not made much difference to the smog levels.'

"I don't think it will go away," he said.

"Woodsmoke is inherently dirty and polluting and they are fiddling at the edges until they ban burning wood in town."

Nevin's woodsmoke calls 'alarming': Maher

Cr Maher said there was a need to reduce the amount of woodsmoke in the air, with the primary focus being to reduce ill health and disease.

He described Dr John Nevin's advice to his patients not to live in town as 'alarming comments'.

Cr Maher believes the measures taken by council will have an impact on the current readings.

"If the public takes up the offers made, there will be an impact" he said.

Council agreed to provide \$300 as a home insulation grant, matching \$300 from the State Government, leaving the householder to find \$400.

Council will also continue its woodheater replacement program at a maximum of \$500 per home, and the SmartBurn subsidy of \$25 per household per year.

The subsidies will be made on a 'first come first served' basis.

Council decline a request for a total of \$15,000 to be provided for an education officer and education materials for a community program on domestic energy and woodsmoke issues.