

Anonymous written evidence

Dear committee, persons involved.

I am just an ordinary individual, in desperate need of help with an air quality issue that has been growing for a number of years. Please forgive me if I cannot form this into a truly suitable piece of evidence for the committee, however I would be willing to share my experience in any way I can for the betterment of this process. If nothing else consider it a plea for help, please listen.

I would respectfully ask you to consider my account of what happens to me on a daily basis regarding air quality both indoors and out. Without sufficient regulation, targets and enforcement many of us will simply suffer. The costs to our health and nhs will be mounting up.

If I were to go to a pub or workplace, I would be in a smoke free environment, with laws to protect me from harmful passive smoke, no debate as to the dangers of smoke. Cigarette smoke and 'wood' smoke are almost identical. However, The mother of all passive smoking scenarios is ironically growing under our collective noses.

So please imagine yourself sitting in your own home watching tv with children. You smell smoke, assume something is burning and check around the house for possible fire. Nothing untoward inside yet you open the back door to the garden to find thick smoke covering your home and garden. Your next door neighbour has lit a woodstove. You shut all the windows and doors, the smell lingers. Bear in mind if you can smell it, you are already enveloped in millions of pm2.5, benzene, vohc, carcinogens etc. you cant open the window after going to the bathroom, can't open the window in the kitchen while cooking. There may be airbricks or vents in the house that cant be closed. You simply cannot escape it,,in your own home. Several hours later its still going. There are some odd ramifications that are unexpected. You find yourself with an air purifier costing me money and ongoing energy. You can't hang clothes out to dry on a nice day, they come in reeking of smoke. So I use my dryer, the most energy consuming thing in the house!!! My place of safety????

This happens every day!!! Several hours a day, 24/7 for several months!!!

If you complain to your neighbour it quickly escalates into hostility(even police involvement). If you complain to the council you quickly find they are powerless at best or useless and dismissive of the issue(I believe there are upwards of 80k complaints with not one being upheld?). My MP, well they didn't do anything, and there's always the chance that whoever you complain to may be a woodburner themselves!? The chief of environmental services for sefton council has 2 woodstoves in his home, not likely to help me with this problem.

Then it seems the rights are all in favour of the 'polluter', you have a right to burn wood and cover your whole street in smoke. I on the other hand have no rights in my own home to be protected from the residue of their burning, again I have more rights to breathe clean air in a pub!! I am in a constant state of worry, barricaded into my own home with sealed windows for the duration of the winter(this year the burning has extended into late may!!) the damage to my physical and mental health as a result of this awful rise in using woodburning to heat homes is no doubt being repeated all over the country.

So summer is here, the neighbour bought a woodfired garden heater and is now covering my home in smoke again, every evening while they sit in front of it watching the flames. I have to go inside, can't enjoy my garden. Close all the windows and doors. Not even respite in the summer.

Trendy tv shows, adverts and marketing, social media all big up the charming nature of flames. The energy crisis has spurred many on to use burning as a heating method. In truth to do it properly is probably more expensive and still hideously environmentally damaging. So the reality is that most will use their stove to put rubbish in, any scrap wood, treated timber, anything combustible into as free fuel. The ramifications of that are huge. Totally unregulated pollution of unknown chemicals pouring into the air every day. It is naïve to think that people operate these devices to the standard required and the laboratory testing of stoves is nearly on a par with the VW emissions scandal.

Unfortunately I can't attach video evidence to this document. If I could I'm sure you would be genuinely shocked and horrified at the footage I could show you. Astounded by the fact that such awful pollution can go on totally unchecked. Even moreso that I can't do a thing about it. The perpetrator knows darn well "you can't stop me!!"

Woodstoves have become one of the main sources of pollutants in our air and is set to rise. Yet sadly, there is absolutely no worthwhile law, regulation etc that can protect the rest of us from the damage being caused. What there is, is wholly unenforceable and therefore none existent. Measurement of air quality in my area will be from a roadside station a few miles from me, largely to track traffic problems. Woodstove pollution can be extreme, but very localised. If the street or area starts to get a lot of them it can start to become quite an issue, yet still largely unnoticed by broader AQ monitoring. Incidentally the AQ monitoring in my region has never been anything but green for good. Even in heavily industrialised areas on bonfire night!! The limits are set way too high, if they were as stricter it might help.

Its unimaginable to me that in 2023, a world full of issues of pollution and global warming that a device like a woodstove capable of such damage(maybe 450 times more than a hgv pollution according to chris whitty) is totally ok. Ellas law may help but I'm afraid the powerful logging industry and influential SIA and hetas organisations will hold more weight than I. Defra?? No.

Polluters have all the rights, I have no right whatsoever to be able to breathe clean air in my own home. It shouldn't be that way round. Please consider my words, a great many people are being made ill and many more are having their lives and homes blighted by the rise of the woodburner.

Thank you for your time

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