

LET'S CLEAR THE AIR



Air quality in NSW

The air we breathe is easy to take for granted. Yet air relates directly to our quality of life. While air quality has improved in the last 20 years, there is still plenty more we all can do in order to enjoy clean air now and in the future.

Air quality in NSW is generally good, especially compared to 15–20 years ago. This is mostly a result of cleaner cars and fuels, and tighter industry controls.

There are still a number of days each year where the pollution levels exceed national standards. This number is currently higher than the rate allowed for by the National Environment Protection Measure for Air.

The air pollutants that most often reach high levels are photochemical smog (ground-level ozone) and particles. Ground-level ozone occurs due to a reaction between VOCs (volatile organic compounds) and NO_x (oxides of nitrogen) which are emitted all year round. Under warm, sunny conditions, these react together to form smog. You can see this as a white haze in summer.

High particle levels are generally due to dust storms or bush fires during summer. In winter, however, high levels of particle pollution are largely due to hazard reduction burns or woodsmoke. This can be seen as a brown haze.

NSW Health in partnership with the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water NSW issues health alerts for forecast high pollution days.

Environmental impacts of air pollution can be less obvious but still significant. Larger particles emitted into the air are deposited across the local landscape. These can soil and damage materials, affect plant growth and health, and create a

grimy look around urban centres. They can also contaminate land and waterways.

Sources of air pollution can be natural, like bush fires and dust storms, or a result of human activity. Human activity includes burning fossil fuels in industry and transport (mostly particle and NO_x emissions) using solvents in business and households (mostly VOC emissions) and using solid fuels for heating and cooking (mostly particle emissions).

Air pollution in the future is likely to increase unless we act now. Population growth and our increasing dependence on cars is a major factor.

With more people driving more cars more often, air pollution from transport is likely to offset gains made in other areas.

The other contributing factor is climate change.

Climate change and air pollution are closely related (see diagram overleaf).

Warmer weather can provide ideal conditions for smog to form while drier conditions can increase the risk of bush fires and dust storms which create particle pollution.

Some pollutants are also greenhouse gases which lead to climate change. So as we take steps to reduce air pollution, we are also helping to address climate change.

Government actions like improving standards for cars and fuels, regulation for industry, emission reducing programs for businesses and public educational campaigns are making a difference.

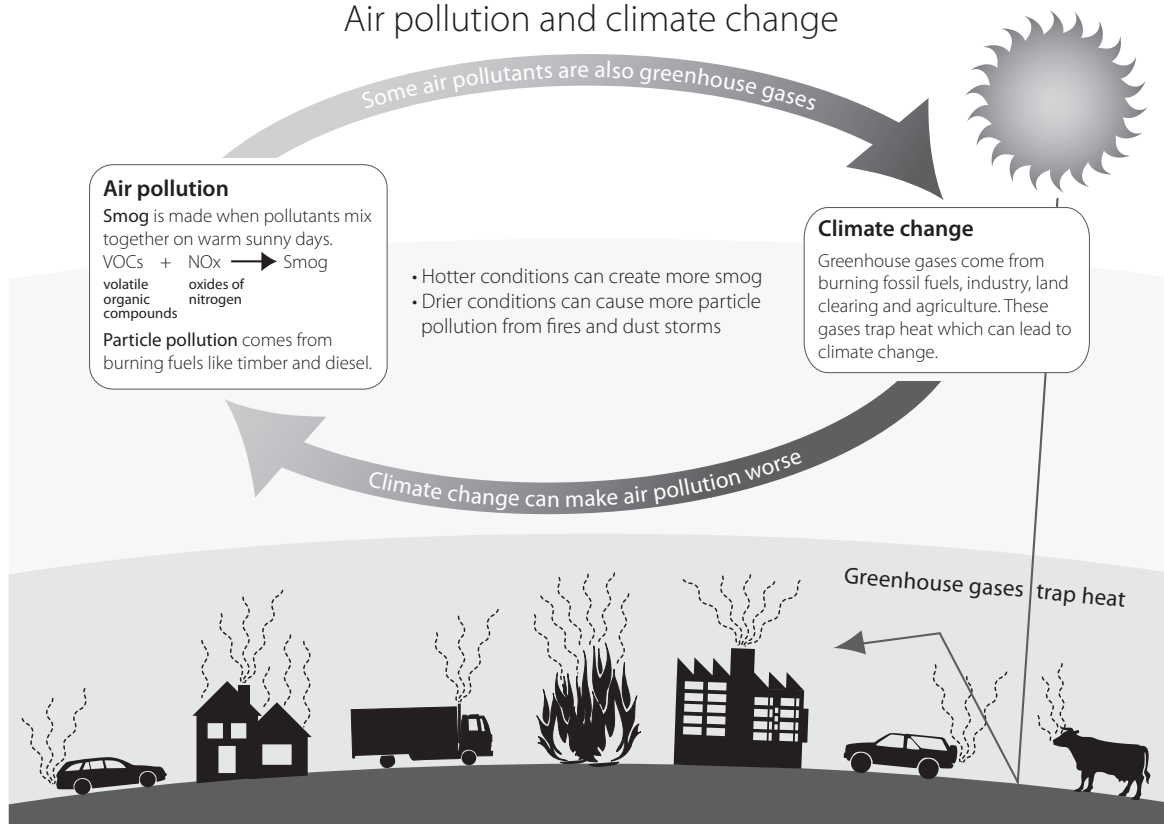


Environment,
Climate Change
& Water



our environment *it's a living thing*

Air pollution and climate change



Adapted from State of the Environment NSW 2000

Some day-to-day actions to take:

- **burn less fuel** and save money
- drive at a moderate and constant speed to use 20 per cent less fuel
- service your car regularly and maintain optimum tyre pressure
- plan your car trips – see if you can drive 1 kilometre less a day
- keep your boot empty – lugging extra weight uses more fuel
- turn off the air conditioning to use 10 per cent less fuel
- turn your engine off if idling for more than 30 seconds
- for short trips, try walking or cycling – there are 3,900 kilometres of cycleways in NSW
- for trip planning and other public transport information, visit 131500.com.au
- report smoky vehicles on the DECCW website – environment.nsw.gov.au
- **avoid products containing solvents** – cleaners, toiletries, furnishings, etc contain VOCs and can affect indoor air quality
- choose water-based products with pump sprays instead
- don't use solvents on hot days as they evaporate more quickly.

In winter

- **use your wood heater properly** – woodsmoke contains toxic chemicals which can pollute your home and our air
- only burn aged, dry wood
- allow plenty of oxygen into the fire
- don't let your fire smoulder overnight
- check that your heater meets Australian standards
- if possible, choose a more energy-efficient and less polluting way to heat your home eg. natural gas.

Check the air quality index (AQI)

(environment.nsw.gov.au/aqms/aqi.htm) for hourly updates on air quality across the state and to sign up for health alerts for both predicted high pollution days and notification if high pollution occurs on the day.

cleartheair.nsw.gov.au

has more tips on how to help clear the air.

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